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(page 364)

I'LL WARN THEM ALL IN SPITE OF YOU

THE OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

AND OTHER STORIES

BY

ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS

ILLUSTRATED

BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
The Riverside Press Cambridge
1909

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Published October 1909

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THE OATH OF ALLEGIANCE

It was the time of great purposes and small hopes; it was the time of grand deeds and dark dreams; it was the time of glory and madness, of love and despair; it was the time of the greatest motives and the noblest achievement, the truest praying and the bitterest suffering that our land and our day have known.

The story which I have to tell, in so far as it is a story at all, is a tale of the war, and therefore not in the fashion. It is in such important particulars true that it may ask a respectful hearing, since, in the matter of which I have to speak, it will be found that the fact rather than the way of putting the fact is the source of interest.

It was the summer of the year 1862, in the New England university town which let us call Bonn upon these pages. The year and the term were at their bloom; the elms were in rich leaf, and stood stately, like unconscious pagan divinities, august, in groups and ranks upon the college greens. The paths were weeded and clean. The grass was long and luxuriant; for this was before it was thought necessary to shave one's lawn to fighting-cut. The June air

melted delicately against the cheek. The proper cultivated flowers grew in the proper places, as such things do in well-directed towns. The white Persian lilac was in blossom in the sedate gardens of the faculty. The well-trimmed honeysuckle clambered over the well-painted porch. The June lilies, in rows, stood decorously dying on the edges of the graveled paths. No one ever did anything indecorously in Bonn,— except, of course, the boys.

One of the boys had been dangerously near an indecorum in one of those highly cultivated gardens on the June day of which we speak. It had been a merry day, full of sun and winds and spices, full of the essences of growth and blossom and of reaching on to that larger life which precedes a glowing death; and the sturdy boy felt it, as he ought to, restlessly; not as the serene elms did, and the white lilac. The elms always seemed to him to belong to the faculty.

As he sat in the shade of the particular elm that overhung the southeast corner of Professor Thornell's garden, on the rustic seat (of iron, painted, not at all rusty) against the high stone wall, the arms of the tree swooped over him vigilantly, and gave him an uneasy sense as of one who would be requested to stay after that recitation if he forgot himself. Nature herself always seemed, in Bonn, to be appointed by the trustees.

His companion on the painted rustic seat did not

say "swooped." She said "swept," — the branches swept. She was the only daughter of Professor Thornell.

The young man, it was easy to see at a glance, was of the sort known in college circles as the popular fellow. This may mean almost anything; it sometimes means the best of things, as perhaps in this instance. He had a happy, hearty face. His eye was as direct as a noon sunbeam, and at times as bright; at others, it withdrew, like the eyes of a much older man, into a subdued cloud, blue, or gray, or violet, or one knew not what. He had bright brown hair, curly, and beneath the boyish mustache the cut of a firm, rather full, but remarkably delicate mouth was agreeably visible. He had the complexion and hands of carefully reared but athletic boys. He did not look as if he had ever done a stroke of work in his life outside of a campus or a schoolroom. One smiled on glancing from his cheek, ruddy and fair as a girl's, to his palms, gnarled with the knocks of baseball, and his iron wrists. He had a round, Greek head, well set upon his shoulders. Seen for the first time in a crowd, an experienced teacher would have said of him, "There goes a promise, — a well-born, well-balanced promise."

The girl beside him was a trifle older than he, by the shade of a year, perhaps. At their age each camel's-hair stroke of the brush of time tells. This little circumstance added dignity to her carriage and

appearance. She hardly needed it. To some of the students she would have been more charming with a touch less of stateliness, but Harold Grand liked her the better for it. Deep in his young heart he was proud of the fact that the fellows used to say that you could not get near her with a ten-foot pole. This ancient and obvious figure of speech was the final college tribute to the distance, the modesty, and the sweet haughtiness of womanhood. Young Grand rated it accordingly.

In the pleasant, delicate fashion with which our best young people conduct such comradeships they had been friends for a long time, as university time goes, since junior year; and he was about to graduate. They talked friendship, as young folks do. Of love they had never spoken.

We speak of language as if it depended upon the lips to utter. What does the heart say, and what the turn of the head, the touch of the hand, the fall of the foot, or the mood of the eyes? He sat looking at her that day steadfastly, with the bright, fearless, masculine gaze before which her own drooped. She leaned against the painted seat, and stirred uneasily. "Will you have the rest of the song?" she said. She reached around without turning her head, and lifted her guitar from the grass to her lap. Miriam did not play the piano, like the other girls. To please her father she had accomplished herself in the use of this

old-fashioned instrument, her mother's guitar. She played for Harold now and then because he liked it. Little dashes of light from the elm branches overhead flecked her sensitive face. She was not a beautiful girl, but she had the prophecy of a noble face.

She wore the "spring-and-fall dress" of a well-regulated professor's daughter, who must always appear as pretty as possible on the least possible sum of money. The dress was gray, trimmed with dark blue. Her eyes played between the two colors. She wore a drapery sleeve, in the fashion of the day, with a wide, full white undersleeve finished with a narrow linen cuff; a linen collar bound her throat: both were fastened by plain gold studs. Her hands, like her playing, were different from the other girls', for she wore no rings.

Young Grand was quite familiar with the details of this severe little costume, for it was not new this spring. It seemed to him a kind of celestial uniform created for her, but he had never said so. She mourned sometimes that she could not "dress" when Harold called. She would have liked to put on a new gown every time he came to see her, and so be a new girl on each occasion; but she had never said that, either. She did not feel so when the other boys called. Now, when Tom Seyd came it was quite different.

"Yes, play to me, please," said Harold Grand.

She struck a few notes, and stopped.

"I can't!" she pleaded.

"Why not?"

"It 's because — it 's the way — it 's the way you look at me."

He did not look at her any the less for this. She began to tremble, and her cheek blazed. Then he took a swift, manly pity upon her, and folded his arms and turned his head, staring at the stone wall and the elm tree. He had never touched her in his life; beyond the conventional grasp of meeting and parting, his hand never met her hand. He would as soon have dared to touch the Ludovisi Juno. But now his moment of weakness overtook him, as it overtakes most of us at some unexpected time. His fingers strolled to the edge of her gray dress; his arms ached to take her, so he folded them, like the young gentleman that he was, and nodded at the faculty elms as who should say, "No, sir! You don't keep me after this recitation!" And Miriam began to sing.

Thus ran the scene of their simple courtship; so plain and pure and young, one might say so primitive, that it seems almost too slender to reset, in these days when our boys and girls coquet with the audacity and the complexity of men and women of the world. And that was all.

Call the memory on wings through the upper air, move the sympathy gently, and summon the imagination softly, and, possibly, then one may understand what one has forgotten or what one never under-

stood. We keep ourselves supplied with superior, slighting phrases for the loves of boys and girls. It would become us to preserve our respect for, and our comprehension of, experiences which may be the tenderest and the truest of life.

And Miriam, under the elm tree in her father's garden, to her mother's guitar, began to sing: —

"Under floods that are deepest,
Which Neptune obey;
Over rocks that are steepest,
Love will find out the way."

She had a sweet, not a strong voice; and she sang as the young and the happy do. Harold Grand unfolded his arms. He became curiously aware of the pressure of his mother's ring upon his finger. His eyes dropped from the elm to the white lilac; then they strayed to the drooping yellow lilies. The end of the long blue ribbon at her throat blew in the warm air against his wrist. He restrained it softly with his hand.

"Go on," he whispered; for the girl had stopped.

"Over the mountains
And over the waves,
Under the fountains
And under the graves,"

sang Miriam, —

"Over the mountains,
And under the graves,
Love will find out the way."

Her voice fell and ceased; her ringless hands strayed over the strings of the old-fashioned instrument; she looked as if she had come out of a picture of the date of her mother's youth. He watched her profile, with the braid of brown hair low in the neck, and the silver arrow piercing the coil above. The air began to cool a little in the hot garden. The bees whispered sleepily to the honeysuckle, disdaining the lilies, which had left their prime behind them. The afternoon sank.

"Yet I like them," said Miriam abruptly. "I love those yellow lilies as long as they live, and when they die I love their ghosts. You never could think how they look by moonlight! I come out sometimes and walk up and down that path, quite late, to see them."

"You are changing the subject," suggested the young man, but not with the self-possession that the little sally might have implied.

"I have forgotten what the subject was," said Miriam mischievously; for she had recovered herself the first of the two, as women do.

"Oh — it is one as old as — older than we are — older than earth is, for aught I know," the boy said, passing his hand over his eyes. "And I was going to say — to try to say — "

Then the color burned the girl's fine, reserved face from brow to throat. Then she caught her breath, and thrust out her hand as if she would have inter-

rupted him. But she was spared her pretty maiden trouble.

Professor Thornell, accompanied by Professor Seyd (of the Scientific Chair), came down the garden walk. The two learned men walked ponderously between the rows of yellow lilies. They discussed the unfortunate friction at the last faculty meeting, and the probable course of pedagogical harmony at the meeting of that night. They were absorbed in these great themes. They looked vaguely at the young people on the painted iron settee. Professor Thornell smiled affectionately at his daughter and passed on, and forgot her at once.

It no more occurred to him that she and young Grand needed matronizing than that he should offer a chaperon to the busts of Apollo and Minerva in the college library. But when he had paced to the garden fence and back again, he stopped confusedly to say: —

"My dear, I forgot — we are so driven with commencement business — I forgot entirely that I had a message from your mother. She said I was to tell you — How unfortunate! It was some minor domestic errand. Professor Seyd, what *was* it that Mrs. Thornell desired to have done?" pleaded the Professor of English Letters helplessly.

"She desired a salad prepared for supper," prompted the Professor of Science accurately. "She

desired, if you found Miss Miriam, that she should prepare a *potato* salad, with the addition of beets."

Miriam rose at once. She gathered her guitar to her lap, and put on her straw hat. The two heavily instructed gentlemen continued their walk up and down the garden paths; supperless and inaccessible, they discussed faculty matters till eight o'clock that night.

The two young people passed on up to the house between the rows of dying lilies. They passed in silence, and separated at the front door. The winged moment had fled. The sacred embarrassment of youth and love fell between them. For his life he could not then have finished his sentence. Nor could she, for hers, have helped him.

Now, the scientific professor, having an unscientific and emotional wife, had gone home, as her nerves exacted, to report himself to her; thus he came late to the faculty meeting at the president's house. Professor Thornell was annoyed.

"We need all hands to-night," he remarked, with the natural acerbity of a colleague.

Professor Seyd turned upon him a stiffened face; it showed an unprecedented lack of color; he was usually a red, comfortable man.

"Have you seen the bulletins?" he demanded shortly. "I am just from the telegraph office. We have been defeated again. Our losses are said to be" —

He began slowly to repeat, with his own frightful, statistical accuracy, the rumors — for there were only rumors yet to turn to — of the evening: *Killed* — *Wounded* — *Missing* — a fearful table.

The faculty sprang from their chairs and gathered round him, while with pallid lips he recounted the horrors of one of the worst days of the Peninsular Campaign. The gray-haired president uttered a fierce, unscholarly exclamation, and automatically reached for his hat and cane. He acknowledged afterwards that it came into his head to go down town and enlist. For once in the history of Bonn University, commencement was obliterated from the consciousness of her professors. The quarrel in the faculty was forgotten. The Professor of English Letters and the Professor of Science shook hands with the Mathematical Chair, their chronic foe.

"The boys are beside themselves. They are unmanageable," said Professor Seyd, with evident agitation. "The whole university is in the streets. It is rumored that President Lincoln will issue a call for more troops. Five-sixths of the senior class will enlist, if he does, and — God bless them! — I would if I were they!"

He had a boy of his own in the senior class. It never had occurred to him that *Tom* could go.

"Hush!" said Professor Thornell, with a break in his voice. "Hear them, now. Listen!"

Far down the street and wide over the college green the boys were singing; not wildly, but with a restrained pathos and solemnity, strange to their young lips: —

"And then, whate'er befalls me,
I 'll go where duty calls me."

The tramping of their steps fell on the smooth, hard streets like the marching of an army corps. It approached the president's house with measured tread.

"The college militia is out," observed Professor Thornell. "They have done some good drilling, our boys."

The faculty answered with proud eyes. These elderly men flung open the doors and windows, and rushed out like boys to meet the other boys as they poured upon the lawn, calling for speeches. In the centre of the crowd stood the college company, drawn up rank and file. The lights blazed upon their grave young faces. They saluted their instructors solemnly. Their captain advanced from the line. He stood apart, with his curly head bared, while he conferred with the president. Nobody had such a manner as young Grand. He had heroic beauty that night. His eyes were elate and remote. He seemed to see no person present.

But Tom Seyd, back in the ranks, looked straight at his old father.

In the house of the Professor of English Literature,

half a mile down the surging street, a girl opened the window of her room, and put aside the white dimity curtain, to lean over the sill and listen. The drum-beats tapped the hot night air, and grew above the ceasing and the silenced college songs.

"It is the boys out drilling," thought Miriam. "They are having a good time. I wish I could see — He looks so handsome in that uniform! And Father will make them a speech."

Commencement at Bonn was but a broken drama that agitated year. The ceremonials began, after their usual fashion at that time and in that college, upon one of the closing days of June. But on the first of July came the yet well-remembered call of the President of the United States for three hundred thousand more recruits.

He who lived the war through in a university town knows what patriotism meant, in those large days, to our educated men. Where was found the purer motive, the braver, nobler act? What class of heroes in our smitten land offered to their country life more high and precious, or death so calm, intelligent, and grand?

The scientific professor, with his habitual accuracy, had foretold the turn of affairs in the college quite precisely. In fact, five-sixths of the senior class, in one wild burst of sacred rage, offered themselves for

enlistment; and a large number were accepted. The boys exchanged their diplomas for their muskets. The professors held an impromptu faculty meeting on the platform of the exhibition hall, where, for the first time in the history of the old university, commencement etiquette was hurled to the winds. The short-breathed trustees clambered up by the winding stairs into the anteroom, and these venerable men, with streaming eyes, signed the sheepskins, which they dispatched after the young heroes who had flung scholastic honor and peace and safety down at the scorching feet of that great July. And so the senior class of Bonn was nobly and irregularly graduated, and marched away.

In those fiery days, personal tragedy was but the little tongue of flame in the great conflagration. Men swept to their doom with ecstasy, and the firm-set lip trembled only when it gave the last kiss at home. Women, old in trouble, took upon their souls one anguish more, and uttered no complaint. Girls — sometimes I think that the girls had the hardest of it. Nobody thought so then, or perhaps believes it now. Who has ever measured the depths of the possibility of suffering in a girl's heart? She is so unused to life, so young and trustful of joy! She expects to be happy; she has endured so little, she has hoped so much; she tastes of tenderness and anticipates delight; she

prays to God, she adores her lover, and believes in her fair fate. Why do the gray-haired women weep? What is this prattle about trouble that she overhears? By love she is incredulous of sorrow. By youth she overcomes the world.

Miriam, in her father's house, sat dumb. In an hour, in a moment, it seemed, her catastrophe had come upon her. At the call for three hundred thousand more to fight the war out, he had given himself, without doubt or delay. The captain of the college militia had dashed into service without a commission, and came to her in his private's uniform to say good-by.

In the whirlwind of those few wild days, leisure was the inaccessible thing, and privacy impossible. He came: it was a matter of moments. He was allowed a day in which to visit his home in New York; for he had a mother and a sister. *They* had rights. Miriam had none. Who thought to leave the boy and girl alone together? It did not occur to the unimaginative mother of an unengaged daughter to force the situation, or to create a difficult tête-à-tête in a house full of company long ago bidden for the spoiled commencement, and staying over out of sheer excitement, to discuss the national emergency. It did not occur to the Professor of English Literature, who bustled in to bid his favorite student Godspeed, and to tell him that the university was proud of him. Bab-

bling guests overflowed the parlors and library, the piazza, and the hall itself.

It was raining, and the garden was uninhabitable. The two young people, in the pitiable publicity which, forced at the crisis of fate, has separated thousands of approaching lives, said farewell. They looked miserably into each other's eyes. Miriam heard an old clergyman in the back parlor doorway talking about Arianism. A professor's wife in the hall was cackling to another about the lint that she had picked for the soldiers. Dully the girl was conscious that her father — dear old stupid father! — stood behind her. He was telling Harold for the third time that Bonn was proud of her noble boys. Before everybody she and Harold clasped hands. Before all those people she saw him move across the threshold of her father's door, and step out into the summer storm and leave her. She stirred into the vestibule, and stood beside him. In the garden the elm trees were tossing about; a wet gust blew against her thin dress, — she wore a white organdie muslin with a little vari-colored pattern; she shivered in the wind. From the stone wall drops were dripping on the iron seat. The yellow lilies lay over in the gravel, beaten by the storm.

"I shall write to you," he said, "I shall write." He wrung her cold hand. She gave one look at his bowed face; its expression awed her. She saw him put on his military cap. He turned and lifted it when

he had reached the sidewalk. All the people stood about, but he looked only at her.

Miriam made her way back through the commencement company. She felt her way upstairs by the banisters, for she seemed to be going blind. She held the muscles of her face stiff. Everybody could see her. She was only an unbetrothed girl, — she had no right to cry.

She got up to her room, thrust open her blinds, and leaned against the dimity curtain. But she could not see him. She thought she heard the tread of his ringing feet as they turned the corner.

She tottered to her white bed, and flung herself face down. And the people babbled in the parlors. But the old clergyman talked no more of Arianism. Word had just been sent him by telegraph from New Hampshire that his only son had enlisted for the war. By and by a maid knocked at Miriam's door; for young Mr. Seyd had come; he would go to camp in the morning.

"Oh, I can't — I *can't!*" moaned Miriam. "Maggie — manage somehow!" She held her arms up to the other girl, her mother's servant, the only other young thing in the house.

"An' that you sha'n't!" cried Maggie. She went up to Miriam, and out of her warm Irish heart, and on the passion of the solemn time that washed out all little human laws and lines, she kissed her young

mistress, for the first and only time in her life, and went away without a question or a word.

Confused phrases ran through Miriam's burning brain: "Father and mother hast thou put far from me — in this hour." Only the Irish maid understood.

From Washington he wrote to her. It was a short note, dashed off in pencil upon the journey, on a leaf torn from his diary. Already the solemn strangeness of his sacrifice had moved between them. In a day the college boy had become a man. He had other things to think of besides herself. He wrote of the national emergency; he spoke passionately of the Flag and its perils; he said that he hoped to go soon into action. He should write her a letter before then.

"This is all I can manage now. I write on my cap, in the cars. The boys are chattering about me. They are all in excellent courage. Some of them are talking about my being made lieutenant. It was too bad all those old coves were round when I came to say good-by. I wanted to see you alone.

"I shall write again, when I can collect my thoughts as I wish to. I shall certainly write before I go on the field. I have a good deal to say to you, and I want to hear from you before we go under fire."

And this was all. From the young soldier no other message came to her. The poor girl tied her thick winter veil across her hunted eyes, and shadowed the

post-office, anticipating all the mails before her father got them. She knew that the regiment had been ordered to the front, — everybody knew that. She knew no more than everybody knew. There was no letter.

Days writhed by, as such days do; weeks, — how many she could not have told. She lived like a creature under vivisection, who understands what the men of science are saying around the torture-table. Her mother had begun to notice how she looked, and the Irish girl watched her furtively.

The professor's wife came slowly upstairs one burning midsummer day, and pushed open the unlatched door of her daughter's room. The blinds were closed, and Miriam sat in the green darkness by the window, in the great old-fashioned chair, cushioned in white, that she had gone to sleep in when she was so little that her feet could not touch the floor. Her face was turned toward the lines of fiery light that blazed between the slats of the blinds; her head lay back against the chair.

Mrs. Thornell stopped in the middle of the room. Her countenance was agitated.

"My dear," she said, with embarrassment, "Professor Seyd has news from Tom. There has been — I think they called it a skirmish — it was not a great battle — but Tom was wounded; not dangerously, I think. They have gone on to bring him home."

Miriam opened her eyes; she did not turn her head, nor did she find it necessary to speak.

"And — there were others hurt — and — Harold Grand."

"You need not try, Mother," said Miriam distinctly. "Maggie told me. She brought me the paper."

"He died nobly!" faltered the mother. "And — it was instantaneous, my dear. He did not suffer — like some."

"Thank you, Mother," said Miriam. She turned her head away from the hot window, and shut her eyes. Her head lay heavily against the high white chair. Helpless and distanced, her mother stood uncertain. Then she stole away and went downstairs.

Miriam crawled across the room, and locked her door. After a little she went back and unlocked it. She had no right, she remembered, even to turn the key upon her unnamed, unauthorized, unmaidenly anguish. She stood alone in her room, and lifted her arms up once to the invisible sky. In her face was one of the challenges that God himself must find it hard to answer.

"How do women bear their lives?" she said.

God who sends them only knows. She bore hers as other women do who are smitten as she was. Perhaps, on the whole, she bore it better than many. But she was very young.

The letter did not come. At first she looked for it

a little, with the defiant hopefulness of youth. It was a long time before she gave up haunting the post-office. She went in the morning sometimes, but in the evening always. Her hand shook so that the clerk noticed it, when she took her father's seven o'clock mail. In time the reaction struck, and a sick horror of the whole thing came upon her. Then she went no more. "I shall write to you," he had said. But he had not written.

They brought him to his mother's home in New York; and although it was vacation, a delegation from the college went on to his military funeral. His mother and sister, in their black dresses, tied the flowers about his sword, and the scattered students wore crape upon their arms for thirty days.

Miriam wore her gray dress with the blue trimming, and the muslin with the bright spot. She would have gone on her knees for the shelter of a black veil in which to hide her face from the eyes of people. But Miriam had no right to the sacred insignia of mourning, in those days thought as necessary to the decency of grief as tears. She pinned on her bright ribbons, and trimmed her hat with flowers; she went to merry-makings with the young people, as she must. She laughed when she had to. She did not cry: that was the worst thing about it. She had never cried since Maggie brought her the paper with the list.

After a while she stopped wearing those two dresses,

the gray, and the organdie that she had on the last time she saw him. She folded them and put them away, for she could not bear to look at them. Only girls will understand this.

On the guitar, now, she did not play. She could not hide that; it must stand in the parlor, in its usual corner. But she put away the sheet of music on which were penciled the notes of the old English song that she had sung to him: —

> "Over the mountains,
> And under the graves,
> Love will find out the way."

But he had not found out the way.

So she took up her part in the long tragedy of life, and supported it, as her nature was. Her pride was as fierce as her love; the twain seized her like fighting Titans, and tare her. She stood her ground between them, as strong youth does; and one day she opened her sad blue eyes and noticed that she was young no more.

It took the most ardent lover she had ever had to call her attention to this unobtrusive fact; which was the last thing that he had intended to do. It was a June day, in the year 1877, when Tom Seyd spoke to her, — fifteen years after he and Harold had enlisted. Tom had loved her all his life; he had never loved any girl but Miriam. She was a woman now, thirty-five years old, and he a man.

Since young Seyd had become his father's assistant professor he had been an absorbed, ambitious man; but he had forced the leisure to see her so often that she had become in a measure dependent upon his evident tenderness, as he meant she should. Indeed, she would have missed it. She cherished beautiful, preposterous ideals of friendship, as lonely women do; dreaming of noble devotion which asked for nothing in return. She blessed Tom Seyd in her desolate heart that he had never "made love" to her. and never would.

So when he told her, that day, without prelude or apology, that he had always loved her, she experienced a suffocating, moral shock.

"It won't do," said Seyd firmly. "It won't go, all this about friendship. I do not feel the need of a friend. It is a wife I want. I love you."

"But not in *that* way!" protested Miriam.

"I love you in just that way," replied the young man, as quietly as if he had been analyzing a crystal before the sophomore class. "I do not love you in any other, and I never have."

"Then you have deceived me!" cried Miriam, growing as pale as a pear-blossom.

"I undeceive you, then," said Seyd. "I love you, and I believe that I could make you happy, if you would let me try."

He stated his case with something of his father's

scientific manner; dryly, so far as the words went. But his voice shook, and his hand. And into his gray eyes, that she had always thought so commonplace and "worthy," she could not look; for they beat and blinded hers. She felt in them that which the most lovable of women do not often see, the loyalty of an unselfish, unswerving, lifelong love.

She knew good women who would have given their lives — it was in her heart to say, would have sold their souls — for love like this.

And for what should she fling it from her? For the memory of a memory, the shadow of a wraith, the echo of the voice of an unseen spirit flitting through a dark and ghostly realm; for an oath of allegiance to a claim that had never existed; for love of a boy who had not loved her enough to find a way to tell her so before he died.

"I have waited fifteen years," said Tom Seyd patiently. "I have not intruded on you, have I? I have not been stupid about it, I think. I understood how it was. But I have loved you all the same and all the while."

Her white cheek burned. A sacred shame, even after all these years, covered her with womanly confusion. She remembered how she used to be called the proudest girl in the college town. Did he taunt her with her pitiable love? "Let me go!" she gasped.

"No, no," he pleaded. "Sit down here beside me—for a minute. Listen to me — here."

Then she lifted her eyes, and behold, he had led her to the painted iron seat against the garden wall. The elm tree rose above it, venerable and calm. The white lilac was in blossom; the bees of Bonn sang to the honeysuckle; in rows the yellow lilies were beginning to die.

But Miriam stood rigid and tall. She looked through him and on, beyond him, as if he had been the ghost, and that dead boy the living man.

"If I ever listen to you," she breathed, "it will not be *here*."

And with this she fled and left him. But his heart leaped with hope and madness; and he went down to his father's laboratory to try a difficult experiment, in the delirium that a man knows but once in life.

Miriam went up the garden walk and into the house. She felt her way by the branches of trees and shrubs; for she had, for the second time in her life, that feeling of one about to be stricken blind. The house was still that night, and empty. The professor was at faculty meeting, and the professor's wife at a commencement tea. It was one of the rare occasions when a grown daughter in her father's home may command the freedom and solitude which become so precious as we grow old.

Maggie brought the tea-urn, but said nothing.

Maggie had grown old and sober. There was a grocer's boy who never came back from Antietam. But Maggie wore his ring, and shared her quarter's wages with his mother. Miriam looked with a fierce envy, sometimes, at the Irish girl.

It came on to be a moonlit night, sultry and sweet. Miriam went to her own room, but could not stay there. She caught up her straw hat and wandered out. House, garden, home, seemed too small to hold her. She struck into the street, and began to walk. Automatically her feet turned towards the post-office, as they used to do fifteen years before, when the seven o'clock mail came in. The boys were singing on the campus. All the college town was bright and alive.

"I am the only ghost in it," thought Miriam.

Her father's mail had been taken, and she came wearily back. Into the dark parlor the moonlight fell through the long muslin curtains. The guitar stood in the corner. For the first time for fifteen years she took it in her trembling hands. There was no one to listen. She played and sang: —

> "Over the mountains
> And under the graves,
> Love will find out the way."

With the wail of the worse than dead her voice faltered through the empty house. She laid her cheek against the old guitar and patted it.

"Oh, good-by, dear!" she said.

The college boys on the campus began to sing those cruel army songs, fifteen years old. What right had *they*, these fortunate, light-hearted sons of pampered peace, to torture people who lived the war through?

"Farewell, farewell, my own true love!"

Impossible! Impossible to think about Tom Seyd till the boys had finished singing! And it was imperative to think about Tom Seyd. Miriam put down the guitar, and ran upstairs with her fingers in her ears. If she should listen to this live man, dead ones must be kept still. She cried out as if the boys of Bonn could hear her, or would regard her if they did, "Oh, boys, stop that singing! . . . It murders us, — women grown so old that you have forgotten we're alive!"

When the knock came at her door, she did not hear it at the first; for she was moving through those spaces where sound is not, nor time, nor human interruption. She was lying on her bed, with her face buried in the pillows. The moonlight built a bridge straight through the middle of the dark room. She got up and crossed it, to come to Maggie, who stood upon the threshold.

"Oh, Miss Miriam!" said Maggie, with broken breath. "For the love of God, come here! Come out to me lamp and see . . . for I darsen't go into the dark to give it yez!"

In the hall, a hand-lamp was set upon the little table. Maggie tottered beside it; the cheek of the Irish girl was whiter than the paper in her shaking hand.

For she held a letter, stained and marred and time-discolored, bearing the forgotten red postage stamp of the denomination of the war; a letter as old as — O God! as old as anguish! For when Miriam dashed it up against the light, the house rang with such a cry as it would have broken his heart, in heaven, to hear.

"It is his ghost," sobbed Maggie. "His ghost has taken his pen in hand to comfort yez!"

But when has it been recorded in the heavens above, or on the earth beneath, that a ghost could write as he had written? Living was the hand and living was the love that penned those worn and faded pages.

With a clang she locked, and double-locked, and triple-locked the door, to read this message from beyond the grave. She had the right now. — She could keep the whole world off. She and her sacred joy and her holy grief were sanctified at last. He loved her. He had loved her then and always. In a few manly, ardent words, written upon the march, he had poured his heart out, and placed it in her keeping. He had meant to write differently, he said. He had waited to find a better time. But war made no way for love. Would she listen to this poor love-letter? Spoiled, he said, as so much else was spoiled, — the

lives of men and the happiness of women, — by the accidents of war.

"I shall give it to one of the boys who is on the sick-list and has a furlough," he wrote, "and he will get it mailed for me, — in Washington, I hope, or even in New York. I think it will go more quickly so, and surer. Our mails are irregular, you know, and uncertain. Write to me, if there is time. We may be called into action any hour. I hope I sha'n't disgrace myself, for your sake. I think I shall behave better if I can get your answer, — either way you put it. I have never dared believe you really love me. But if you do, or if you can, — enough, I mean, to be my wife some day, — I don't think I *could* die if I knew that. I should come back all right. 'Love would find out the way,' you used to sing — it seems fifty years ago! I shall write my mother about you, if you give me the right, at once. She and my sister would want to see you. I send you that old ring of mother's you used to see me wear. It is the best I can do, on the march. Wear it for me, dear, if you do love me, till I see your face again. For I am

Your own, and only yours,
Till death and after it,
HAROLD GRAND."

She read. She clasped the gray and tattered paper to her bosom and buried it there. She fell upon her

knees, and lifted her streaming face to heaven. And then, for the first time in all those years, she broke into terrible sobs.

So much of this story of a letter as is true I tell; and for more I cannot vouch. What was the fate of the message for fifteen years withheld from the stricken girl? Perhaps the soldier on the furlough died. Perhaps, at the time, his pockets were not searched. Was he some friendless fellow, for whose affairs nobody cared? Did the letter slip between the lining and the army blue? Did the uniform pass from hand to hand? Perhaps it was cut up some day for a veteran's son, and so the worn envelope slipped out, and some one said to one of the children, "There is an old army letter, sealed and stamped, and never sent. Run and mail it, my dear. We must not open it or keep it. It may be some poor girl has waited for it all these years." Whether in this way or in that way God's mysterious finger traced the lines by which the dead boy's declaration of love did force its way to her, who shall say? I know no more than you, no more than she; for I tell it only as it was told to me.

Only this I can append. When young Professor Seyd came to the house again, that evening, the Irish girl stood in the front door and barred the way.

"It 's no use, Professor Tom," said Maggie, "an' that I takes upon meself to say. There 's a dead man

got ahead of yez. Me and you are nothin', Mr. Tom, — nothin' to her but just livin' folks."

Then Maggie told him what had happened. And Tom Seyd went back to his father's laboratory without a word. In this he showed the discretion of his temperament, which accepts a fact, be it what it will and lead it where it may, without an idle protest.

On that great glad night, she had forgotten him as utterly as annihilation. The Irish girl was wise. He was nothing to Miriam but a living man.

The elm tree in the garden could have taught him that; and the Persian lilac might have told him, "It was not love she gave you." But the yellow lilies kept awake to watch for her.

She came at midnight, when all her father's house was still. She wore the old white muslin dress with the little colored pattern. She held her head like a bride, and trod like the Queen of Joy. Nor God nor man could say her nay, now. Proudly she took upon her soul the oath of allegiance which binds the living to the dead, — that ancient oath, so often taken, so often broken, and sometimes kept. She stopped beneath the elm, and stood beside the iron seat against the garden-wall. The hot night had grown cool and calm. The moon-light lay at the flood. There Miriam put his mother's ring upon her marriage finger; and there she lifted from the earth to heaven the solemn face of the happiest woman in the land.

COVERED EMBERS

WHEN the stenographer knocked at the door, John Herrick laid down his brief impatiently.

"I believe I told you not to disturb me," he remarked. His manner had the courteous formality with which he was in the habit of addressing this young person.

Her brows wrinkled. She had the haughty pompadour roll, the coquettish puff of white tulle at the back of her neck, and the severe black-silk cuffs characteristic of her class.

"I have done nothing but see people all the morning. I reminded you that I would see no one else until I finished this. It is important. You will say that I am very much engaged."

"But, you see," suggested the girl, shutting the door behind her, "this is a new one, from up-country, I guess, — I should say as much as thirty miles out; perhaps forty. He 's got to get the train. His business is very important, — but they all say *that*," admitted the experienced office-girl. "He says he 's got to get the one o'clock train back to China."

"Oh, very well," replied the lawyer, "if he comes as far as that — I 'd better see him."

The circumstance that John Herrick was a gentle-

man indescribably affected the new client, who had entered the room noisily; he brought the aggressive scowl of a man whose acquaintance with the bar had been limited to the shysters he had met and the newspaper reports that he had read.

"I came," began the man, with a natural tactlessness not lessened by embarrassment, "because you was recommended. That 's the only reason."

"Ah!" replied Herrick, with a charming smile; "to whom do I owe this pleasure?"

"To last Sunday's 'Planet,' sir. You won that case. Me and my wife have been reading it up. My name is Dinsmore — of Dinsmore & Peeler."

The visitor, who had begun to speak in an oratorical key, as if he were addressing a prayer-meeting, now dropped from the combative to the conversational, and took the chair which the lawyer had suavely indicated.

Herrick sat watching him with a clear scutiny, shrewd but straightforward. Dinsmore was a big, beetling man; his thick hair and his jungle of a beard gave one the impression that he was top heavy. His eyes were black, and of a smouldering sort; on the surface they were cool, or even cold, and his manner was arbitrary.

Herrick thought: "Born tyrant. I pity his wife." But he said: "I am at your service. What can I do for you, Mr. Dinsmore?"

"Well, you see," blurted Dinsmore, "me and my wife can't get on. We want a divorce."

The lawyer's expression changed indefinably. Indifference and politeness strengthened into gravity and attention. For this class of cases he cherished a distaste out of proportion to his success in the recent instance which had attracted comment in the press and added to his already brilliant reputation. In fact, he had only touched that out of chivalry; the woman was wronged, and she was dying.

"Ah?" He leaned back in his chair, with the motion of a man who has made up his mind not to neglect the client. "That 's a pity."

Dinsmore's jaw fell a little, and he sat staring foolishly. This was not what he expected from an attorney who was about to take his money for the disruption of a home.

Embarrassed by he knew not what, and resentful he knew not why, he hurriedly began to talk as if he had been cross-examined; in point of fact, the lawyer had not yet put a question.

"I am Robert Dinsmore, of the firm of Dinsmore & Peeler. There ain't any Peeler — he died of a shakin' palsy, but we go by the name the neighbors are used to. We 're in paint and wall-paper. My address is Southeast Street, China. My wife's name is Anna — christened Diana to the Methodist Episcopal Church. I 'm a Baptist myself. We don't agree in

religion more 'n we do in anything. We ain't happy together. We can't get on. We want to be divorced."

"Why?"

"What business is it of yourn?" shot back the client.

"I can give you the address of some other attorney," suggested Herrick, smiling. "There are many. You can take your choice."

"By gum!" exploded the mechanic, "I chose *you*, sir."

"Very well, sir. Then you will answer my questions, and do it like a gentleman."

"I ask your pardon," slowly said the client, after some difficult thought. "Go on. I ain't used to this sorter thing — nor I ain't as used to gentlemen as you be, Mr. Herrick. Go ahead."

"Now we 're friends," observed Herrick, in his winning way. "And we can get together. Foes can't, you know. And counsellor and client must work together, as much as — well, in another sense, like man and wife. Litigation, like marriage, demands harmony — while creating discord," he appended, under breath.

"That 's just it," urged Dinsmore. "There ain't any in our house. It 's one eternal and infernal bob-whizzle."

"What is — excuse me; the word is unfamiliar — what is your definition of a bob-whizzle?"

"Why, it 's a — it 's a bob-*whizzle*," answered Dins-

more, dogmatically. "If you'd ever been bob-whizzled, you'd know without *askin'* what bob-whizzlin' means."

"Possibly," returned the lawyer, wheeling in his chair and looking out of the window at the opposite building; its dead stone-wall constituted at once his foreground and perspective. "But if you will have patience with my ignorance — suppose you particularize. Precisely what do you understand by the striking phrase that you use? Is it anything — that is to say —"

"*What!*" cried the house-painter.

"Is there anything in this case such as your present manner forbids me to define too particularly?"

"What do you take us for?" gasped the client, starting from his chair. "Why, we 're respectable folks!"

"I understand perfectly; of course. In other words, you are not unfaithful to Mrs. Dinsmore?"

"*Me* unfaithful to — my wife? Good Lord, sir! Why, I never *thought* of such a thing!"

"You will excuse me — we lawyers have to be blunt, you know; that is our business. There is, then, no other question of equal or greater delicacy involved?"

"I don't know what you 're drivin' at," said Dinsmore, with ominous precision.

"I mean to say that, as a husband, you have no moral grounds of complaint?"

"If you mean to insinerrate that my wife — Diana Dinsmore — *my wife*, sir, is capable of — of anything — like that — If you was n't so much smaller 'n me, I 'd knock you off a fifty-foot ladder and not pick up the pieces."

"Come, Mr. Dinsmore," replied the lawyer, good-naturedly, "be a reasonable man. We agreed to be friends."

"I did n't agree to set here and have my wife insulted," cried Dinsmore, in a high key.

"You don't suppose it 's any easier for a lawyer to put such questions than it is for a client to answer them, do you?" asked the attorney, with a self-possession which now began to act upon the client's nerves, like slow massage, set deep, and working to the surface. "Sit down and tell me all about it. Why do you want a divorce? Don't drink, do you?"

"I 'm a member of the First Baptist Church of China," answered the mechanic, simply.

"The lady's habits are good, of course? I was sure of it."

"We ain't a dissipated family," replied the client, in a weakened voice.

The lawyer went firmly on. "What is the ground of complaint? Desertion? Won't she live with you? Have you ever stayed three years away from her?"

"I hain't been three days away from her — for thretty years," answered Dinsmore, dully.

His face had now begun to assume a vacant look; his fingers jerked at his beard, and then skulked after his hat. Herrick noticed the stains under the man's nails, where vermilion and ocher had refused to yield to turpentine baths. It occurred to the lawyer that he was dealing with a simple-hearted, good fellow, and that his professional aim had overshot.

"I ain't an edoocated man," said the house-painter, not without dignity. "We can't all be, I suppose. But I 've got some sense left in my skull — if I did come to this here office. And I say, sir, I 'd rather be a house and sign painter — walls papered in the latest styles at short notice — an' live in South-east Street, China, — and make an unfortnit marriage with a good woman, — than mix up with sin an' uncleanness the way you do. She wanted a city lawyer," added the client, plaintively; "she said they knew so much. I guess she 's about right there — if you 're a specimen. I 'd rather dry out in China — like old putty — than have your learnin' at the expense of studyin' out the wickedness of this tarnation town — or livin' in it, either."

"And so would I," answered the lawyer, unexpectedly. "You have altogether the advantage of us. It is that which makes me sorry to see you throw it away. What did you say was the reason you wanted a divorce?"

"Eternal bob-whizzlin'," urged Dinsmore, relaps-

ing into his earlier tone. "She gets mad. She says things she had n't orter. When she does, I don't *like* my wife. She don't like me, neither. She says I order her round."

"Do you?"

"I dare say. She deserves it. Besides, she 's a woman. It 's natur' to order a woman round."

"Well?" asked the lawyer. "Go on."

"That 's about all," replied the client.

"Nothing else? Consider carefully. Are you telling me the whole story. How about cruelty? Any blows? Did you ever use her roughly?"

"I may not be a gentleman," said the mechanic through his teeth, "but I am a man. Once I yanked her apron-string, and mebbe there was once I sorter pushed her into the wagon of a Sunday when she was all-fired late,—and another time I knocked a coffee-cup outen her hand. There warn't never anything worse."

"Did she ever offer any personal violence to you?" pursued the lawyer; his mustache twitched a little as he put the question.

"Do I look like it?" demanded the client, fiercely; he held out his huge clenched fists.

"You never were five years in prison, I am sure?" inquired Herrick, with his perfect manner.

"Good Lord!" cried the client, sopping his forehead with his handkerchief. "Any more questions where that come from?"

"Then," returned Herrick, quietly, "I do not see that you can obtain a divorce — in this State. If you will allow me to say so, I think it is fortunate that you cannot. In fact, I advise you strongly against such a step. I am sure you would both regret it. I should rather not further your making such a mistake — even if the statutes permitted."

"But I thought that was the way you fellars made your money!" cried the client. He sat with his mouth open, staring.

"There is one thing," observed the attorney, in a low voice, "better than the pursuit of money, or the habit of having one's own way, — those I take to be the two great errors of life in our day, — and that is a human home. It is the best thing there is in the world. If I were you, I should save yours — somehow."

"But we 've gotter have that divorce," insisted Dinsmore, obstinately. "She says we have."

"Very well," replied Herrick, taking up his brief. "Bring her here Friday morning at half-past ten. I will see what can be done."

It was early May, and the evening was chilly, with a formless blur, neither fog nor rain. Dinsmore shivered as he walked up the path between the dahlia- and peony-beds and pushed open his own door. His wife had not come to meet him, but she stood in the entry, expectantly. She was a small woman, who had

once been pretty; she was neatly dressed in black cashmere, with a fresh white apron trimmed with edging that she had crocheted on winter evenings; she wore a modern stock of lace and blue ribbon about her still well-shaped throat. Her hair, now rather gray, had been of the reddish variety; she looked like a woman with a warm heart and a red-haired temper.

"Lost your train, did n't you?" she began, nervously. "I 've been watchin' all afternoon. Supper 's hot and ready."

"I 'm beat out," said Dinsmore, handing her his hat.

She took it with the readiness of a wife who has always waited on her husband, and hung it up for him. As she did this, she avoided his eyes, for she felt that these evaded her. Dinsmore put his lips together in the obstinate way that she was used to; he did not— she perceived that he did not mean to — speak.

"Well?" she asked timidly. The habit of being afraid of him was old and fixed; the prospect of freedom from it did not seem to help her any, yet.

"He says we can't do it," said Dinsmore, stolidly. "There ain't any law."

"There 's gotter be a law!" cried the red-haired wife. "I 've been miser'ble long 's I can stand it."

"Guess I 'm even with ye on that score, Anna." The painter laughed unpleasantly. "You got no call to plume yourself that I know of — beginnin' to bob-whizzle already."

"We got no call to set out to quarrel that I know of, either," returned the wife, in a gentler tone. "It always disagrees with you to get riled before eatin'. You must be powerful hungry, Robert."

"I could eat a pint o' white lead," admitted the man, with a mollified air. "Besides, he says he 'll think it over. He says for you to come there along o' me on Friday, and he 'll see."

"My spring sack won't be done till Saturday," urged the woman. "But mebbe Mary Lizzie can be drove on it a little. Here — I 'll bring your other coat. You go lie down on the lounge till I get supper on. I don' know when I 've seen you so beat."

"That 's a fact," said Dinsmore, plaintively; he yielded to feminine sympathy as he had always done, — as if it were a man's right, rather than a woman's gift.

"There 's shortcake." said Mrs. Dinsmore, cheerfully. "I got the first strawberries Dickson had for you. They ain't half so sour as you 'd expect, — and I whipped the cream."

Dinsmore as he ate his supper seemed to smooth in soul and body; one could see the outlines of his cheek round off and his smouldering eye cool. When he spoke, it was in a comfortable tone.

"There ain't a woman in China can beat you on strawberry shortcake, Anna, if I say it as should n't."

His wife blushed with pleasure.

"It 's your mother's receipt," she observed, with a tact worthy of a happier marriage.

Dinsmore cordially passed his plate for a second piece.

"You see," he said abruptly, "we ain't wicked enough, neither of us."

Mrs. Dinsmore lifted the pained and puzzled expression of a woman who, however unfortunate her matrimonial experience, has never disputed the inferiority of her own to her husband's intellect. It occurred to her that Robert had begun to discourse (he was naturally a little oratorical) upon some abstruse subject, like politics or savings-banks, — one upon which she could not be expected to follow him; she was quite in the dark as to his drift, until he offered a magnanimous elucidation in these words: —

"There ain't no law for decent folks. If we wanter divorce, we 've gotter do some mean thing to 'arn it. Mebbe if I take to drink we might stand a chance. If you 'd ruther, I can knock you down — I don't favor that way, myself. If you 'll jam me over the head with the family Bible, it might do; it 's good 'n' heavy. There ain't no other way I can see, onless I steal something and get sent to prison for five years. We ain't neither of us loonies, and I 've been so near-sighted I hain't deserted you. I can, if you say so. 'T ain't too late. But it takes quite a while — three years. If you was to elope with a fellar, that would

help us out. Can you think of anybody you 'd fancy?" As Dinsmore uttered this long and inscrutable discourse, his wife had grown pale, and paler; her plump elbows shook.

"He 's wanderin'," she thought. "He 's taken a a spell and it 's gone to his head."

"Let me get you a dose of your spring tonic, Robert," she purred, soothing him. "An' then I 'll fix you up a nice hot foot-bath 'n' mustard, and send for the doctor. You must have taken cold, or maybe you 're a mite bilious. There, Rob, there! You come along o' me, and I 'll take care of you."

It was so long since she had called him Rob that the word arrested Dinsmore's attention and quenched the retort burning upon his tongue. He looked at his wife steadily and with a certain interest, as if in a new subject, or a new phase of an old one.

"You don't understand, Anna. You 're a woman, and I had n't orter expected it. I ain't out o' my head; I 've only been to the city. This ain't loonacy. It 's law. I ain'ter goin'ter take no spring tonic," he added pugnaciously. "Nor I ain'ter goin'ter go to bed. I 'm goin'ter light the settin'-room fire and set by it. I 'm cold. It 's so cold I guess I'll keep it agoin' till mornin'. Burnin', did you say? Good and ready? Well! That 's nice, Anna. You 'd better go to bed. I 'll set awhile alone. You 've given me a fust-rate supper, and I 'm much obleeged to you, Anna. But there 's

times a man has to be alone — and this is one of them times — We may as well get used to it. We 've gotter set alone a good deal, I s'pose."

The wife shriveled away into herself at once. Without further words the two parted for the night. She washed the dishes and went slowly upstairs to her own room, which her husband had not entered for longer than either of them cared to recall.

Robert Dinsmore sat by the hearth and fed the fire gloomily. His thoughts flickered as the blaze did, under the big birch logs, which he crossed and recrossed, and built up and built again; but his feeling went steadily to ashes as the fire went. He perceived that two respectable people who had married ought to be able to live together in comfort and in what is called peace. But he felt that in his own case something fundamental to this mysterious achievement was lacking; he supposed it was what is known as love, but he was not quite sure. That it was something which had been, and was not, was plain; beyond, he got into fog. He shook his head as he crouched over the fading fire. His wife never saw the look that settled over his large, unfinished face. He sat brooding till midnight, as an unhappy man will, bitter and separate. Then he covered the fire carefully with its own ashes, hot and cold. "It 's a tarnation late spring," he said. "I guess I 'll keep it up overnight."

. . . . . .

The stenographer's brows wrinkled perplexedly when she admitted the unworldly couple. A composite feeling of disdain and respect struggled for expression in the face of this sophisticated young woman as Mrs. Dinsmore, in her new spring sack (visibly unappreciated by the office-girl, though conceded to be the banner of fashion in China), was introduced into the inner office. A peremptory wave of the girl's hand relegated the husband to a seat in the waiting-room without.

"That young lady with the tulle rosette behind told me to come in here," began Mrs. Dinsmore, with her company manner. "She said you wanted to see me alone. My husband is right out there in call," she added, with a sudden sense of propriety.

She could not remember when she had been shut up in a room with a strange man. Indeed, she had never met a man like this one. His delicate courtesy, his high-bred features, his chivalrous smile, first bewildered and then charmed her. When he said, "I thought, Mrs. Dinsmore, we had better talk matters over together," she could have told him everything she had ever thought or felt.

The instinct for the confessional which is so strong in every woman is not provided for by the polity of the Methodist Episcopal Church, and Anna Dinsmore, who was in her own way a reserved wife, had never told her story to her minister. Herrick's sincerity and

sympathy, qualities necessary to a successful counselor, and obvious in him, drew the woman on. The misery of years melted from her lips. In half an hour he had a life's history, and the heart of a wretched wife throbbed in his hand.

His face underwent a change as the consultation progressed; the experienced lines about his mouth wavered, and his melancholy eyes dwelt upon the client kindly; once or twice they grew moist, and once his finger dashed to the lashes.

"And the child?" he asked gently. "I understood you to say that there was a child?"

"One, sir. We never had but one. That was a little girl, — that was Deeny. He named her Diana, after me. He used to call me Nan in those days; he don't now. But we called her Deeny. She called herself that before she could talk. Deeny died. She was three years old. She was the prettiest little girl, Mr. Herrick, you ever see. — Her father set the world and all by her. It 's fourteen years come Sunday after next since Deeny died."

Herrick arose silently, opened the door, and beckoned the husband in. The two sat before their lawyer like children before a father, with downcast eyes. The man was the first to assert himself.

"Well!" he began, in a loud voice. "I suppose she 's been pitching into me?"

"On the contrary," replied the lawyer, sternly,

"your wife has taken her full share of the blame — more than her share, perhaps."

"I 'm obleeged to ye, Anna," observed the husband, after some thought. "I wisht I 'd done as much by you. I 'm afraid I did n't. I told him you bob-whizzled."

"Now, if you will be influenced by me," began the lawyer, in his paternal tone; it was that of a man who has listened to the uneven tempo of so many hundred disordered human hearts that he might have been pardoned for slighting the exigency of these plain people; instead, he made it his own, as a few men might who hold and honor the name of counselor, — "if you will be guided by me, you will go home and begin all over again — make the best of each other, and of life, in short. You have no case at all. You cannot obtain a divorce in this State. If you feel that you must separate, you can do that, of course. I can arrange the details, if you wish."

"That would do," said Dinsmore, quickly. "It 's more respectable, and it ain't so ondooable either, is it?"

"I guess we 'd like that," added the wife, but slowly, and with averted eyes.

Those of the lawyer saddened a little; he had the look of a man who has lost his case. But he said: —

"I have told you what I advise. If I were in your place, I should try again. A hot temper and an

arbitrary will are not a fatal combination. I assure you that it 's a pretty common one. It 's worth the fight to get the better of it, — or so it strikes me."

"We 've fit — and fit," replied the man. "We 're beat out."

"Yes," assented the woman. "We 're tired of it."

"Very well," returned Herrick, curtly. "Come a week from Monday, and I 'll go over the details with you. I am greatly pressed for time just now. Mrs. Dinsmore, if you please, I will speak with your husband a moment alone."

When the two were left together, the counselor's manner abruptly changed. John Herrick's face had taken on a certain transparency, making him look fairer and finer than most men; he wheeled in his office-chair before he began to speak. His words were carefully chosen and few in number. These were they: —

"Dinsmore, I want to tell you about a friend of mine — a man I knew well. He was not happy with his wife, and they parted. They had one child — it was a little girl; it died. After that they drifted apart, the way people do, — and then they drove apart. Matters got worse — you know how it is. They had begun by loving each other — very much — very truly. When they found that they were losing this — precious thing — this feeling that brings men and women together — and leads them to meet life

patiently and tenderly for one another's sake,— they did not try to hold it; they let it go, and so — I think I told you, did n't I? — they parted. She went — in fact, they put the seas between them. I think the man was the more to blame — I think we are apt to be to blame. It is n't a very easy thing to be a woman, Dinsmore. Let us put ourselves in their places. Come! They need to be loved manfully, nothing cowardly about it, — not to whine over the disappointments of marriage. These are altogether mutual.

"A woman has got to be *cherished*, Dinsmore, — yes, even if she is quick-tempered. A man can do that, though he has outlived his honeymoon. This man that I tell you of began to think so after a while; after he had lived alone till the ferment of things, — that is, perhaps I do not make it plain, — till his first irritation and soreness had healed and calmed. One day he said to himself: 'I will take the next steamer. I'll go to her and tell her how I feel. We will try again. We will begin all over.' That night, Dinsmore, that same night, he had a message from her by cable — Do you see? — that very evening. She said, 'Come at once.' — When he got there, she was — He was too late. She was dead. — He never had his chance to try again. — You have. Good-morning, sir."

Herrick wheeled and dismissed the client, who went from the office with hanging head and walking on tiptoe.

Robert Dinsmore was not a quick-witted man, as we measure men and minds, but he had it in him to surmise, if he did not perceive, that the counselor had shared with a stranger, the sacred tragedy of his own history; and that he had done this delicate, self-obliterating thing not to save a case, but to save a client's happiness and a human home.

When Dinsmore had gone, John Herrick turned the key in the door. The stenographer knocked in vain, and whisked away, pouting. Herrick did not get to work, but sat for some time looking at the dead stone-wall, which constituted his foreground and his perspective.

The late spring lagged. The peonies and dahlias in front of Robert Dinsmore's house held up green finger-tips, as if they were trying the weather, and found it too cold to venture into, so came no farther. For several evenings the fire burned late on the sitting-room hearth, and the man sat before it, silent and apart, bitter and determined. As determined, but sadder and more gentle, the wife wept on her pillow, listening for his heavy footfall turning to his down-stairs room. If the night were cold, she could hear the scrapings of the shovel as he covered the fire to hold it over till morning. Like many big men, he had small weaknesses and self-indulgences; fancied a warm place to dress in if it were chilly, and crept

there with his clothes, half guiltily, while his wife was building the kitchen fire and getting breakfast.

The lawyer had allowed the couple ten days before the fateful and final interview which should indicate the terms of their separation and put its details into execution. If it occurred to them to wonder why, in reply to the incontrovertible statement on Mrs. Dinsmore's part that Monday was washing-day, Mr. Herrick had nevertheless insisted on that moist date, they had not protested, and obediently pursued their preparations for the step which they now curiously felt as if they were legally obliged to take.

It was to their simple minds as if their fate were in the hands of a sheriff. In a sense it was. The dark sheriff Disillusion that arrests fugitive married love, and does not easily let go, had laid a heavy grasp upon these two. Yet the mechanic perplexed the lawyer by a certain fine magnanimity which would have embellished the soul of what is called a gentleman: —

"Allowance? All there is, if you say so. I don't propose to cut Anna short. I'm in comfortable circumstances and have laid up consider'ble. I don't want more 'n enough to pay the laundryman and find a little to eat somewheres. I can sleep in the shop. She must have the house, it stands to natur'. No man could turn a woman outer doors. I want to pervide handsomely for Anna."

"Mr. Dinsmore is very generous to me." His wife, to her neighbors and relatives, said this proudly.

The domestic misfortunes of the two were now the scandal of China, and she reported to her husband the efforts of the village to preserve the indivisibility of their home. Public opinion was against them; their course was felt to be a distinct reflection upon the character of the community and the standing of the Baptist and Methodist churches.

The unhappy husband and wife were made to feel themselves the object of a general censure so unexpected and so severe that they combined instinctively, like the happiest of married people, to resent it.

They grew, in fact, quite friendly over their common misfortune, and discussed it daily between gusts of a mutual irritation.

"Your minister called here to-day. He preached at me for an hour. I told him I preferred to be disciplined by my own denomination. He said wives orter submit themselves to their own Baptist husbands."

"*Your* minister came to my shop this afternoon. He pitched into me for quite a spell. He said husbands oughter love their wives, as Christ loved the Methodist Church."

It would not have been easy for Robert and Diana Dinsmore to say when they had passed so much time in each other's society as since they had agreed to forswear it forever.

All this was by day. With evening their spirits fell, and they crept apart. The wife cried a good deal; but never in his presence. She was mysteriously and remorselessly busy — over what, he could not have told, she seemed to be working about the house all day, giving it the religious touch of something more sacred than spring-cleaning; washing his bedspreads, ironing his shirts, doing up curtains in his room, mending flannels, disinterring camphorated mummies of summer clothes — all *his*, all for *him*. His smouldering eyes saw everything, but he asked no questions. With the eagerness of a bride, the skill of a happy and experienced housewife, and the sadness of a widow, the woman worked on doggedly. He thought what a neat, sweet housekeeper she had always been — snapping, sometimes, when he tracked in mud, but always ready to mop it up after him with a laugh. He thought — he began to think — how many comfortable hours he had owed to her for how many years. He hated to see her tiring herself like this — at the last.

"What ails you, Anna?" he asked sharply.

"Don't ye darst find fault with me — now!" she cried, quavering. She took up the big stocking she was mending and went into another room.

Dinsmore stared after her. His large face wrinkled uncomfortably. She could see him from where she sat, though she seemed not to. She thought: —

"He was a handsome fellow — those first years. He 's lost consider'ble looks the last two weeks. I hope he 'll keep his health, and not get to complainin'. I don't know who to mercy 'll look after him if he should have any of his spells. His aunt Sophia could n't no more 'n a" — she paused for an adequate simile — "no more 'n a camphorated woodchuck," added the New England wife.

The spring relented slowly and began to burgeon. The dahlias and peonies thrust up their arms beside the front walk. In the bed under the south window — that had been the little girl's window — an old-fashioned flower called the star-of-Bethlehem budded and blossomed; it was a delicate flower, lily-shaped, or star-shaped, with a gray shade and a white light.

The fire in the sitting-room was not burning now, but Dinsmore kept it carefully laid, and sat by its cold hearth dolorously. It had come to be Saturday night — the last that they were to spend together. Dinsmore had been quiet and dull; but Anna worked all day. She did not stop sewing until nine o'clock; then she put away her thimble, folded a big pink and blue outing-shirt neatly, and came and sat down beside her husband. The unlighted fire lay between them.

"I believe I 've thought of everything," she began, in a tone as if she had been entertaining a caller with whom she was on rather distant terms. "Your winter

ones are all done up in camphor, — summer ones in the lowest drawer of your bureau. I don't think you 'll find a button off of anything. I hain't intended you should. All yer stockings are mended up 'n' turned at the heel. Your furs are in the big chest in the attic, — here 's the key. I 've had 'em all aired 'n' sunned 'n' brushed, an' done up in camphor 'n' cedar-oil, I know you hate moth-balls. Don't you never let anybody — " She broke off.

" The house is clean 's clean from top to toe, Robert. I 've had everything out and everything in. It fairly smells of soap 'n' water 'n' sunshine. You 'll find your spring tonic in the medicine cupboard. I do hope you will — will — you will take good care of yourself, an' not get any of your spells. I should kinder hate to have you get sick and me — I hope you 'll change your feet when you get 'em wet, when I — Then, come sunstroke weather, remember how I always put a wet sponge in the crown of your straw hat, won't you? You 'll find it over the kitchen dresser. I 've baked a dozen pies — all sorts. I 'll roast a couple of fowl and leave doughnuts — and those long cookies with holes in that you like. You can get along for quite a spell, till that camphorated wood — I mean your aunt Sophia comes. I made up my mind after we come from that lawyer o' Monday night, to stop along o' Mary Lizzie."

"*What?*" shouted the husband.

The wife winced — as she had done, how often! — at his rising voice. But she answered steadily: "I 've made up my mind. I ain'ter goin'ter turn you outer your own home. I 'm goin'ter stop along of Mary Lizzie. I could n't seem, anyways, to turn you out, Robert. It don't seem fair. I ain'ter goin'ter do it. I ain'ter goin'ter stop here. I 've fixed everything for you, Robert, pretty 's I know how, and come o' Monday, I guess I won't come back. Seems to me it would be easiest, somehow. I — No, Robert, no! I *ain't* cryin', nor I ain'ter goin'ter cry. You lemme be, that 's all. Hain't you always been at me all these years to let *you* be, to let you have *your* way? Now, I 'm goin'ter have *mine* — for once. I 've made up my mind. I know you 've got one of your own, but it ain't big enough to change mine this time. I ain'ter goin'ter turn you out, and that I 'm set on. I could n't stand it, Robert, no way in this world, to see you campin' in that shop. A man is such a helpless creetur, a man is such a — such a *tomfool* without a house and a woman in it! No, I ain'ter cryin', either, but if you darst touch me, Robert, I shall — I shall begin to —"

He did not dare to touch her. He was a dull man, as we have said. Before his wet and winking eyes, before his empty arms, she whirled and fled. He heard her sob her way upstairs, and heard her lock her door.

She was quite self-possessed the next morning; more so than the man. Dinsmore flung himself about the house uneasily, and took an after-breakfast pipe — a secular amusement which he did not allow himself on Sunday. When he knocked the ashes out in the hearth the fire caught and blazed robustly; he watched it with sombre eyes till it had fallen quite away.

"It 's the last one," he thought. He gave the fender a kick as he shoved it into place.

They went to church as usual, and reflected what credit they could, and such discredit as they must, upon their separate and distinct denominations; he drove her both ways, and helped her in and out of the buggy. She got up an excellent Sunday dinner for him, one of her best, and it must be recorded that he did generous justice to it, and that this gratified her very much. In the afternoon she began to grow a little gray about the mouth, and he noticed that her hand fumbled with her apron when she came at last and stood behind him. He was laying the fire on the cold hearth.

"Well," he said, "you don't object, do you? I thought I 'd leave it as it had orter be. It won't — we sha'n't — *I* sha'n't set by it any more, I s'pose. If you think you 're goin' to Mary Lizzie's, you never was more mistaken in your life, Diana Dinsmore. You *can't* leave this here house. It 's your house.

Mr. Herrick 's got the deeds made out. Come to-morrow he 'll pass 'em, and you gotter stay."

"I ain'ter goin'ter," replied the wife, with the inexorable obstinacy of gentleness. "I ain'ter goin'ter turn you out. It ain't gospel."

"Well, it 's law," persisted Dinsmore. "Mr. Herrick 'll make you. You 'll see."

"Is n't it kinder late to be fightin' as to which shall treat the other prettiest?" asked Mrs. Dinsmore, slowly.

"By gum!" answered Dinsmore, "I never thought of that."

"Robert," began the woman, laying her hand timidly on his arm, "have you forgotten — "

"I hain't forgotten a blessed thing," interrupted the husband, shortly.

"It 's fourteen years — you know — since —"

"Lord, don't I know?" groaned Dinsmore. "I 've thought about it every night I 've set here this two weeks past."

"Would you mind comin' along o' me — this last time — same 's we 've done for fourteen years — to — to visit with her, Robert? The star-of-Bethlehem is up. It 's always up — in time for Deeny."

"It *gnaws* at me so, Anna!" The man put his hand to his heart as if he were undergoing a physical pang. "I always feel it — here," he said.

"I did n't know but you 'd *like* to go and say

good-by to Deeny — with me," urged the woman, drooping; "but never mind!"

"Oh, I 'll go!" cried Dinsmore; "of course I 'll go."

Silently the two went out of the house, and silently took the road together. They walked with bent heads. Their feet seemed to carry them without direction of their wills to the greening, budding village churchyard. Anna held the star-of-Bethlehem in her hand. Now and then she buried her face in the silver-gray, lilylike, starlike flowers. Once he thought she kissed them, but he did not seem to see or know it. He seemed to see nothing, he seemed to know nothing, and he had a stolid look when they came to the little girl's grave. One might have thought that he did not care. The bit of marble flickered before his eyes in the cool May sunlight, as if it had been a leaf, or some frail living thing.

What a little grave it was! It had never seemed so short before.

"The letters need polishin' up," he said; he traced them out with his stained forefinger.

DEENY
THREE YEARS OLD
WHEN SHE DIED

"She would have been seventeen, would n't she? I had n't thought of that."

"Shall we divide 'em up — same 's we always have?" asked Anna, hesitating. She was afraid of

him even then, and even there. It was an old habit and an iron one. She glanced at him deprecatingly.

"I don't know 's I care if we do," he answered. "I s'pose Deeny 'd like that."

Anna halved the flowers in silence. He was conscious of wondering why she did not cry. He laid the star-of-Bethlehem on Deeny's grave with his huge fingers; they shook, and one of the silver-gray bells fell. Anna picked it up and kissed it before she added to it her handful. He watched her with wretched eyes; hers leaped, and it was for a moment as if they ran to him.

"There 's Dickson!" he said suddenly, "and your minister's wife. And Mary Lizzie."

The last place in China where grief could shelter itself was in the spot where it grieved the sorest; and on the day when it had most leisure to weep it had least opportunity. There was no seclusion in the village churchyard on Sunday afternoon. The childless parents fled the place before their curious townsfolk, and, climbing the old stone-wall among the blackberry-vines, went home silently by another way.

The mother did not look back, but the father did so once; it seemed to him as if the bit of marble turned a little, like something that watched them. But marble does not move, and Deeny could not. She lay

deep among the roots of spring, with the star-of-Bethlehem above her.

The two came to their home as mutely as they had gone from it, and made no attempt to reassume the shield of words. It was as if it had suddenly proved to be made of some false substance — gauze or paper — and hung ragged in their hands. Now they flung the flimsy thing away.

Anna laid the table for their light Sunday-night supper, and both sat down, but neither ate. Pretty soon she came back and cleared away the dishes. Dinsmore lighted his pipe, and went and sat by the fireless hearth. He heard her stirring about with her soft, housewifely step; she had a light step for so heavy a woman. Anna was not awkward; she had been a graceful girl, and pretty — he remembered how pretty she used to be; he did not know when he had thought of it before. He had been very much in love with her; so had most of the young men in China; but she had denied them all to marry him. Anna had always kept something of the look and manner of a woman who has been ardently and frequently sought in youth, and when marriage ceased to sustain the valuation at which she had been taught to rate herself, she was as perplexed as she was wretched. Dinsmore pulled at his pipe nervously.

"Yes," he thought, "she was a good-looking girl.

And Anna 's a handy housekeeper. If it had n't 'a' ben for bob-whizzlin' — By gum!" he said aloud, "if she ain'ter gone upstairs without comin' to set along of me — this last night!"

For Anna had crept upstairs to her own room, and he heard her lock her door. He put his pipe away; suddenly there was no pleasure in it any more. He stretched his legs out on the cold hearth and, folding his hands, began to twirl his big thumbs perplexedly; his head fell to his breast. He must have sat there for some time. Presently he said: —

"*Deeny* — she would ha' stayed along of me. It would ha' ben somebody. — No," he added, on reflection. "Women hang together. She would ha' stood by her mother — I 'd ruther she would, too. If there 'd ever ben a boy, — but there warn't. No. There warn't no boy. And Deeny 's dead."

He repeated the word aloud, two or three times: — "Deeny! *Deeny!*"

With a cry the man sprang to his startled feet. He did not believe in ghosts; no good Baptist did; but then and there he was sure that one had got into the house. It was well fitted up against burglars, but there were no ghost-locks on the doors and windows, as there are no ghost-locks on a father's or a mother's heart.

It was his wife who had frightened him so — as he started to tell her, but he thought better of it. Her

feet were bare, like any spirit's, and her hand as cold as Deeny's; she had come without sound and she stood without speech; though the night was warm, she had covered her night-dress carefully with her blue flannel wrapper, as if he had been some neighbor or acquaintance hurriedly met in an emergency.

"Lord!" he said, "Lord o' mercy! You scared the sense outer me."

"Robert," she began at once, "I came to — I thought I 'd come — I wanted to sit with you this last time — if you don't mind me. Do you, Robert?"

She looked about timidly. "There ain't any chair."

"Would you care," asked Dinsmore, humbly, "if you should set on the arm of mine? Seein' it 's the last time."

He sank back into the big cushioned chair that he had been occupying. After a moment's hesitation, she seated herself upon its arm. She did not look at him, but began to talk at once: he saw that she had one of those flowers thrust in the bosom of her blue flannel gown.

"I brought it down for you," she said hurriedly, "seein' it 's Deeny's. I picked it up off the grave after I 'd laid it there. I thought you 'd like to keep it — even if you took it from — me. Put it in your Bible, will you, Rob? Put it on that Jairus chapter we read together that night we buried her; about his little girl who was not dead, but sleepeth — don't you remem-

ber? See, Rob, what a pretty flower it is! What a *Deeny* flower! When it is a bud, it is a lily. When it blossoms, it is a star. I 've been thinkin' it 's that way with Deeny. When she died she was just a baby, Rob, no more 'n a lily-bud — a little white thing. Then we could hold her — and cuddle her. Now she 's blossomed, she is a star, and we can't.

"Oh, she was such a pretty baby, Rob! She was such a *dear* little girl! — I — I set so much by her — Ah me! Ah me! — O Robbie, don't blame me, will you — not now? Don't be hard on me — if I set and cry a little — about — about Deeny — this last time I 'll get a chance. Nobody else cares about Deeny but you 'n' me. Everybody else has forgotten Deeny. She 's nothin' but a handful o' dust in the graveyard to other folks — just a little dead baby fourteen years ago. — It 's only fathers and mothers that love dead children so long 's that. Why, Robbie, think! She 's seventeen years old to-day! She 's singin' round heaven, a grown-up girl, same 's she would ha' ben singin' round this house along of you and me."

Dinsmore's large face worked pitifully; a man should not cry — like a woman — but the tears came storming down.

"Now, Anna! Now, Anna!" he repeated, helplessly.

He thought of Deeny as a seventeen-year-old ghost with a harp and wings. But her mother thought of her

as an angel in a long skirt, with a lace-stock and ribbons.

"She was a dear little thing!" reiterated the woman, who was sobbing now without restraint.

"So she was, Anna, so she was!" the father groaned.

"And she set so much by you, Robbie, — climbin' onto your knees to pull your whiskers, and kissin' of you —"

"So she did, Nan, so she did!"

"And singin' of a morning to wake us up — and sayin' her little prayers of an evening: 'Now I lay me' — so gentle and so — so *Deeny.*"

"It gnaws me — here," gasped the man; he laid his hand upon his heart, and changed color. But the woman, herself stupid with misery, went, unobserving, on: —

"Rob — Listen to me; I 've been thinkin' — we can divide everything else — houses 'n' lands 'n' money 'n' all those things that ain't of no account — Mr. Herrick can fix 'em all up, and the law can deal with *them.* But, Rob, *we can't divide Deeny* — no-way in the world."

"That 's a fact, we can't," panted Dinsmore, faintly. "Who ever said we wanted to?"

"The law can't part off Deeny, Rob, between — you and — me. It was love made Deeny, and law can't unmake her. Love and law can fight for ever 'n'

ever, Rob, but *there's Deeny*. Robert? — Say, Robert? Did you hear me? — Robert!"

But Robert Dinsmore did not answer Diana his wife. His head against the tall easy-chair suddenly fell to one side. His big body sloped and toppled, and his wife caught him as he dropped.

"He 's got one of his spells," thought Anna. "I 've killed him — this last night."

Then she fell upon him with the hunger of her starved heart. She kissed him and kissed him, she chafed and stimulated, she wept and called, she warmed him and held him, and yearned over him, and prayed over him, and kissed him again.

"Oh, my man!" she cried, "my man, my man!"

When Dinsmore came to himself he muttered a little, and said queer things: —

"I am not dead, but sleepeth. — I 've lost my chance to try again. — Good-morning, sir."

"It 's a stroke," thought Anna. "He 'll miss his mind same as Peeler, with the shakin' palsy."

But it was not a stroke, and the painter did not miss his mind. He found it, presently, all he ever had, and perhaps a little more. And when he found it, he perceived a marvel.

On the cold hearth the fire leaped and began to burn joyously. From ashes below ashes some hidden spark, some covered coal, had caught, and in a

moment the cold room went warm, and the gray night turned a royal color.

Did wonders, like troubles, come together? For now the man was aware that an unbelievable thing had happened, and this was the greatest wonder in the world. Love had happened. His head was on a woman's breast. He felt her arms, her tears, her lips.

The miracle of married life had happened. Long-forgotten tenderness, smothered and silent, had leaped from the embers of cold years; it was not dead, but smouldered; for love is not a circumstance; it is not a state; it is a living soul.

"That you, Nan?" he asked feebly. "I must have had a spell."

The two sat in the shining, clasped and still. She did not cry any more. She feared to agitate him, and was very quiet. She put her hand to his beard and stroked his cheek. Her wrapper fell away from her neck, but she did not notice that her throat was bare, until he turned his face and kissed it. Deeny's flower — lilylike, starlike, childlike — had fallen from the warm blue gown, and lay upon her mother's bosom beneath his lips.

"Nan," said Robert Dinsmore, "Nan, you may bob-whizzle all you want to."

"But I don't *want* to, Rob."

"And, Nan, I guess I've ordered you 'round some."

"I'd rather you would!" cried the wife. "Should n't

know you if you did n't. What 'll Mr. Herrick say?" she added, in a frightened voice. It occurred to her at that moment that even now the statutes would require her to live alone in the house, while Robert camped in the shop.

Then Robert laughed. "I 'll risk Mr. *Her*rick, by gum!"

"But the law, Rob —"

"Law be hanged! This ain't law. It 's *love!* — That 's a clever fire of yours, Nan," he suggested, smiling beatifically at the hot birch-blaze.

He thought that she had lighted it, and she did not undeceive him. She and the fire exchanged looks, and kept each other's counsel. But the fire laughed.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF AUREOLA

Her phenomenal name had been imposed by a mother who read novels, and opposed by a father who manufactured golf-shoes and mountain-climbers — the kinds that have nails in the soles. Sentiment and sense struggled in the child of one of those difficult unions which may acquire more consciousness of happiness than they give evidence of achieving. All her life she vibrated between the instinct of ideals and the conviction of realities; as she grew older she read more poetry, and wore an extra row of nails in her walking-boots.

She kept her father's factory, as she had kept her mother's name. Long before they departed for a state of being where, whatever may be the custom as regards novel-reading, it seems apparent that shoe-factories will have become an anachronism, her parents had reconciled their personal divergence in her behalf in so far as to agree, with a content that might have signalized a gladder marriage, upon their daughter's name. They called her Aura.

All the village knew her by her Christian name, for all the village honored, and most of it loved, the soli-

tary and sane old maid who had managed her father's business and sustained her mother's charities with the strong, dual nature which gave her something of brilliance and eminence among her less composite neighbors — the people of monochrome or monologue.

These called her "Miss Aura," when they did not call her "Miss Orry." The Miss-Aura citizens, on the whole, lived in one part of the town, and the Miss-Orry citizens lived in another; the Miss-Aura persons went to school and college, and the Miss-Orry persons went into the factory; but these were trifling differences. There was no visible difference in the rather remarkable feeling offered the clear-thinking, warm-loving woman by the community in which she had spent her life, now rounding to fifty-six happy, self-forgetting years.

She came as near to being universally beloved as it is possible for a person of any force of character to become and remain. As she was beyond question the foremost citizen of the town of Glynn, she was, in point of fact, its dearest.

When it began to be suspected that Miss Aura was ailing, that she was seriously ill, that she was not likely to be better, the whole town was uneasy.

When it trickled out somehow that the vigorous, vivacious, generous woman in the large white house by the factory — she who watched with other people's sick, and comforted their mourning, and carried their

poor; she who knew the love-stories of all the girls, and to whom the wildest boys gave confidences that parents and teachers never heard; she who was dear in houses where there was trouble, and powerful in hearts where there was temptation; she who, having no children of her own, had mothered the whole town — when it become known that Miss Aura was capable of dying like anybody else, half of Glynn was skeptical; but the other half was miserable.

In fact, every person in the village knew that Miss Aura could not get well before she had thought of such a thing. For the truth was that nobody was willing to tell her.

"I won't. I tell you, I won't do it! Go get somebody else. You sha'n't put it off on me."

Thus said the old, the very old doctor who had conducted her into the world and her parents out of it, who had looked after Aureola herself since at nineteen and in war-time she fell ill of her first and only romance. He had a little of the same feeling for her that everybody had, added to the other feeling experienced by a faithful physician towards a trustful patient.

"Get the young doctor to do it. Ask the minister. Tell her yourself. Don't ask *me*. I 'll go on a vacation first," added the old doctor, with a blaze in his eyes, but a tremor on his long white beard. "Have n't

I done this thing for enough of you — when nobody else could be got to do the job? Who told old Sam Dobson — Lord! how he cursed! Who told young Amy Grieve — five children and a whole houseful of relatives, but nobody dared open his lips. Who told Annie McDonald when her man went through the ice? And Robert Dawson when his wife slipped under the car? I tell you, there has n't been a case of fibroid, or Bright's, or hypertrophy, — no, nor a drowning, nor a trolley accident, nor a railway smash, — that has n't been put off on me: my own death-certificates and the Almighty's too. Don't you know a doctor 's the last man on earth you should pile this on to? I say I won't. I strike at *this*. I won't tell this woman. I 'll — I 'll go to Europe first."

In truth, the old doctor was so much disturbed that he took a train to New York that afternoon, and was gone some weeks, — an unprecedented circumstance in his history.

The young doctor was left; but he evaded the responsibility on the ground of his youth and recent acquaintance with the patient. A pardonable professional pride in the fact that this public calamity had been his diagnosis filtered through his decorous reluctance to assume the burden of the consequences.

The minister was in town, but he was younger than the doctor, and a certain gentle reserve in spiritual matters on the part of his valuable parishioner had not

encouraged him to open with Miss Aura a subject which everybody else preferred to keep closed.

"I will do my duty, of course," he said plaintively, "but I cannot at present see duty clearly in this direction. Has the lady no relatives who — could be induced? Her house seems always to be filled."

"Always was. Always will be," curtly said the next-door neighbor, one Mrs. Ranney, who had introduced the matter to the young minister. "She 's that kind. Always has somebody on hand 't needs motherin'. Just now it 's those boys — second cousins — nearest she 's got. If you think those smokin', slammin', singin', swaggerin' college boys fit to carry news like this — I 'd ask Emmyline first," snapped the next-door neighbor.

"Who is Emmyline?" inquired the young minister, wavering under the scorn of this attack.

"Why, she 's done for Miss Orry — she 's done for Miss Aura — this twenty years. She 's her hired girl. Would you recommend our leavin' it to *her?*" added the neighbor, scathingly.

"I would do my duty, of course," repeated the pastor, "but perhaps some person who has known the lady longer — some woman, for instance. Why not yourself, Mrs. Ranney?"

"Me!" cried the next-door neighbor — "*me!*" Her large lips quivered. She had a square, freckled face, and it worked. "Why, she 'n' me we 've swapped

patterns and receipts these fifteen years! She 's rich 'n' I 'm poor, her house is big 'n' mine 's little, but she 's never let on to make me feel it, never once in all this time. And the things that woman 's *done* for me, nobody knowin' but us two! *Me!* Well, I guess you 'll have to find somebody 't don't feel to her the way I do — if you can," added Mrs. Ranney.

She was a big woman, and she began, at this, to weep in a slow, big kind of way, which so affected the young minister — who, if he had got to see a woman cry, cherished a preference for having her small — that he fled the scene and the subject precipitately. Not, however, before the next-door neighbor had recovered herself sufficiently to shoot after the retreating divine one poisoned arrow: —

"I thought such things were what parsons were *for*."

Miss Aura went slowly upstairs to her own room. It was early, scarcely eight of a vivid June day — the most vivid of any day that she could remember having lived, since she was nineteen and it was war-time. It had been one of those days when the sky is a hymn and the earth is a song, when the grass-blades blaze and the leaves tremble with delight, when every dandelion is a star and every dandelion ghost a spirit, when a robin's song sets your nerves athrill, and a rose in bud seems a thing good enough to explain the creation of

the world. It had been one of those days when trouble skulks, and pain is ashamed, and death is impossible; when one is avid for life, and confident of having it always; when the sad are comforted, and the glad are ecstatic, and the content are joyous.

Miss Aura had waked that morning and found herself happy. Her soul overflowed. Her heart lifted. Her head was alert, and her hands laden. It seemed to her that she thought of every person she knew who needed her or loved her. Schemes and dreams of doing little kindnesses or giving overlooked comfort fled fast through her clear and active brain. She had one of those exalted hours known only to the strong and the self-subduing, when the possession of joy seems eternal because the power to bestow it is.

"I am glad I am alive," thought Miss Aura. "I shall live a long time. As long as you live you can help somebody. Life is a glorious thing."

She was on her piazza, tacking the woodbine, when one of her boy cousins came out — he was the only one in the house just then — and asked her to mend a glove. He did it something awkwardly, and Miss Aura noticed that he looked sober — for a lad.

"Rob," she asked, with her mouth full of tacks, "anything wrong?"

"I 'm going home," the boy blurted out. "People tell me you 're not well. I 've been all sorts of a fool to stay so long. I 'm not quite such a beast. Say —

SHE HAD ONE OF THOSE EXALTED HOURS

Cousin Aura — I wish you 'd take care of yourself. I *wish* you would."

When Miss Aura looked at the college boy, she saw that there were real tears in his eyes.

She started to say, "Who 's been talking nonsense to you?" but in fact she said nothing, for the lad backed away into the house, and when she had finished mending his glove, he was upstairs packing.

She did not follow him, — she could hardly have said why, — but went into her sitting-room and sat down to draw some checks, and she was busy at her desk when Emmyline, without announcing him, admitted the young doctor.

He was a very young doctor, but he was not a stupid one, and he perceived, without saying so, that Miss Aura had changed since he saw her last. She was of a firm, fine presence; her head had the carriage which belongs to tall women who have been beautiful in youth. Miss Aura's eyes were dark and direct. She turned them upon the young doctor, and he wavered.

"Well?" she said.

"I came to see you — about — a case," parried the young doctor.

Her hand moved toward her check-book.

"How much?" she asked, with the quick cordiality which made it so easy to beg of Miss Aura. "I know you would n't ask if it were not urgent, doctor."

The young doctor fumbled on about the case. She drew a generous check, and handed it to him, smiling. The young doctor rose to go, hesitated, returned, and stood with his hat in his hands.

"I think you ought to be told, Miss Aura — "

"Bad news?" interrupted Miss Aura. "Any of my boys gone wrong? It can't be one of my shop-girls. Scarlet fever at the Dawsons'? Diphtheria anywhere? Nan McDonald has n't — has she?"

The young doctor shook his head with a kind of vexed perplexity, or perplexed vexation.

"I did n't suppose that you were a dull woman," he said. He found himself in the belief that she was playing with him; he turned, put on his hat, took it off again. "I was not speaking of your fellow-citizens; I referred to yourself."

"Oh, well," replied Miss Aura, in a grieved tone, "out with it!"

She had risen from her desk, and stood at her commanding height, which looked down a trifle at the young man; her color was suddenly high, and out of her eyes a certain defiance blazed at the physician.

"You should take the greatest possible care of your health," ventured the young doctor.

"Can't," curtly said Miss Aura; "have n't got the time."

"You have a serious malady," persisted the physi-

cian, more stoutly. "I have been requested to tell you — "

"Nonsense!" cried Miss Aura.

The young doctor's color rose; he bowed, and left the room.

"Nothing ails me but these spells," insisted Miss Aura. She followed him into the hall; the woman's expression had changed, but the fire in her fine eyes had not gone down.

"I feel well; to-day I feel well enough to live forever."

"I have not the reputation of being an alarmist," observed the young physician, coldly.

He closed the front door, and his retreating footsteps struck with scientific precision on the long walk between the box borders that Miss Aura's mother had planted. Miss Aura listened to the curt sound with gentle perplexity.

"I have offended the young doctor," she thought. "I must find out why."

Then she went upstairs to help Rob, and speedily forgot the young doctor. Half-way up she had to stop; then again before she reached the landing. The college boy heard a little stifled cry, and sprang in time to catch her. When she found herself, she was lying on her own bed, and Rob and Emmyline and Mrs. Ranney were in the room.

"I must have had one of those spells," said

Miss Aura, guiltily. "And all Rob's packing to do!"

She put her feet to the floor.

"Emmyline will help me," replied the college boy, winking violently. He and Emmyline went out of the room. Mrs. Ranney remained. She put her large hand on Miss Aura's small one, and mightily restrained her.

"You lie still, Miss Orry. I 've got something to say to you. Here, put your feet up; keep 'em on the hot-water bag. Don't you talk. I 've come to do that myself."

"Well," said Miss Aura, lying back on her pillows, "then why don't you?"

"I 'm *goin'* to," retorted Mrs. Ranney. "It 's a — it 's a pretty day, is n't it? A regular weather-breeder, though."

"I never knew you to talk about the weather, Mary Ranney."

"The Junior Endeavor 's goin' to have a basket picnic next week, Friday."

"Did you come over here, in the middle of the morning, to tell me that, on baking day?"

"Well — no. I don't know 's I did," replied Mrs. Ranney, with a remote, esoteric air. "Fact is, I come to see you on a — it 's very important — I 'm a committee."

"Church fair?" ventured Miss Aura. "Chautau-

qua? Wednesday Club? Or is it that new plan for a Civic League? Oh, I see. It must be the Boys' Temperance, or the Girls' Friendly, or the Factory Library, perhaps. Or else the Mothers' Rest or the Mercy to Animals. How much, Mary?"

Miss Aura's weak hand stirred to her pocket.

"I must have left it down with my check-book," she said.

Across the big, freckled cheek of the next-door neighbor the color of oak-leaves in November burned slowly.

"I don't come beggin', Miss Orry — not of sick folks — not to-day."

"I 'm perfectly well," persisted Miss Aura. "Nothing ails me but spells."

"I 'm a committee of your friends," burst out the next-door neighbor; "I 'm a committee for an autobiography. You are invited to write one."

"Whose?" asked Miss Aura, with unexpected interest. She raised herself upon her elbow. "I should enjoy doing that. I like to write and read. But I never have had time. Whose biography is it?"

"Land sakes, Miss Orry!" cried Mrs. Ranney, with a groan. "It 's *yours* I 'm after!"

"Oh!" said Miss Aura, in a disappointed tone.

"You see," groped on Mrs. Ranney, "the ladies thought — they said — as you was n't very well — and you 'd lived such an inter*est*ing life — so long —

amongst us — and so many folks loved you, Miss Aura — they said, Miss Orry, if you 'd write your autobiography this summer — it might — if anything should ever happen — not that anything ever will. But everybody sets so much by you, dear, and so I 'm a committee to request you — to tell you — Lord!" cried the committee, "I would n't do it again for no man!"

She sat back exhausted, rose, stooped, and kissed Miss Aura with a wet, resounding smack, and rolled out of the room. Miss Aura lay quite still when Mary Ranney had trundled away.

"I don't understand," she thought. "It is a very singular thing; but I 'll do it. I 'll write them their autobiography."

Miss Aura got up and finished Rob's packing and kissed him good-by; ate a little dinner, and tried to sew awhile for the next missionary barrel, but found herself more and more perplexed by the events of that extraordinary day.

For the fact was that the concerted conscience of her fellow-citizens, at last aroused to the necessity of somebody's telling Miss Aura that she could never get well, had broken out in an epidemic. Everybody had hit upon the same day for the performance of this unwelcome duty, and everybody, so far, had failed completely.

In the afternoon the young minister added himself

to the unhappy list. His reluctant conscience, having flayed him to the task, well-nigh deserted him at the crisis. He made a pleasant, impersonal call, carefully selecting every topic in the scope of parish proprieties excepting that which had brought him to Miss Aura's house. He talked church politics, town charities, and the Civic League; the Junior Endeavor, the Girls' Friendly and the Boys' Temperance, the Factory Library, the morning's news, Kipling's last poem, and the Harvard and Yale game.

Miss Aura spoke and listened eagerly. She had what she called a beautiful time. She had never known that the young minister could be so entertaining. She was disappointed when his manner suddenly flagged, and he began in a remote professional way to introduce religious topics. When he inquired about her spiritual condition, Miss Aura politely changed the subject to house-plants, and branched from this illimitable theme to the pecuniary circumstances of the Dawsons and the Grieves. Miss Aura was a good parishioner and a good Christian, but she cherished a reluctance to turning her soul wrong side or even right side out for the inspection of ministers.

"The love of life," urged the young minister, "is a healthy instinct; but the imminence of death — and the necessity of preparation for it — "

"I can't stop to think about death," interrupted Miss Aura. "I've got too much to do."

"Yet, as one advances in years —" blundered the inexperienced minister.

"Sir!" cried Miss Aura. "I am only fifty-six."

"I beg your pardon," interposed the young man. "You see, I am twenty-eight, and our standards are, I suppose, not synchronous. I only wish to remind you — I have been asked to tell you —"

"Tell me something jolly!" demanded Miss Aura, irreverently. "Death is n't in my line, you see."

"I see," replied the baffled clergyman, but without a smile.

He changed the subject to the Day Nursery, the Mothers' Rest, and the Mercy to Animals, and Miss Aura's spirits rose to their natural level. She entertained him so charmingly that he quite forgot what he had come to say to her, and left half an hour later, as happy and, to all appearances, as unspiritual as herself.

But she was tired when the young minister had gone, and Emmyline found her lying on the sofa in the dark. Emmyline lighted the gas, and the face of the old servant showed rigidly in the sharp illumination.

Emmyline was a small woman, and thin; she stooped a little, and her hair was grayer than Miss Aura's. She loved Miss Aura with the long-tried, unillusioned love that is possible only between mistress and maid — an old-fashioned love which has

almost passed out of date in our domestic economy. For fifteen years the two solitary women had shared "the kingdom called home." Neither had nearer ties, and their affection was as mutual as their respect.

Emmyline came up and stood by the sofa; her face was in the shadow, she stood in profile, and that brought out her stoop.

"Emmyline," began her mistress, abruptly, "I 'm not a fool, am I?"

"I don't know 's I ever said you was," admitted Emmyline, cautiously.

"This house has been full of people all day trying to say something they have n't said, Emmyline."

"Think so?" asked Emmyline, but her work-worn hands began to tremble.

"I don't understand, Emmyline. I can't see what they 're all up to. But I 'm not a fool. There 's something. I want to know what it is."

"Lord!" groaned Emmyline. "I said all day 't would be left for me. I did n't hire out for it."

"Very well," said Miss Aura, with the patient sweetness that always brought Emmyline round. "You need n't unless you want to. I only thought — if it is n't *very* good news — I 'd rather hear it from you, Emmyline. I 'd rather than from anybody else in the world. We 've lived together — so long."

"That 's the worst on 't!" cried Emmyline. " We can't live together much longer!"

"What?" gasped Miss Aura. "Not live together! You and I, Emmyline! You going to leave me! *You!*"

"Oh, Miss Orry! Miss Orry!" wailed Emmyline. "It 's *you* that 's a-goin' to leave *me !* "

The old servant got upon her knees beside the sofa, and threw her arms about Miss Aura's neck.

"There ain't one of 'em had the pluck to darst to tell you," sobbed Emmyline. "Me that loves you more 'n the whole keboodle of 'em put together — I 've got to do it! I 've *got* to do it! Oh, my dear! my dear!"

So Emmyline told her — all there was to tell.

Now Miss Aura was going slowly upstairs. Emmyline had gone back to wash the dishes. The house was very still. The street light shone on the box borders that Miss Aura's mother planted.

"Mother died at three in the morning. It was ebb-tide," thought Miss Aura. She had not remembered this before for some years. She went up and on, and into her own room. She locked the door and sat down on the edge of the bed, and her face sank into her hands. Suddenly raising her head, she perceived that the room was dark, and felt an uncontrollable and mysterious fright. She groped for matches, and lighted her candle with a shaking hand. As she did so, her eye fell upon a little book, old, and so much worn that the cover scarcely held to its place; the

print was so small that Miss Aura had not been able to read it even with her Boston glasses for some years; but the book always stood upon the table by her bed.

She took the ragged little book now, and held it for a moment thoughtfully. Then she slid slowly to her knees, and the woman who would not talk about her spiritual condition to her minister laid her cheek upon the Bible that her mother gave her, and, without a word, for the first time admitted to her soul the consciousness of approaching death.

Inarticulate prayer like that expends the body, but sustains the spirit, and Miss Aura, when she rose from her knees, dropped panting upon her bed. But she found that her feeling of fright had quite left her, and presently she regained her strength and got up to go downstairs.

"Emmyline will be worried," she thought. But she whose life had responded always to the claims of other people, and who denied herself in that supreme hour the sacred right of solitude for the sake of an old servant, suddenly found herself confronted by a power stronger than the habit of her life. This was the power of a memory.

Lingering to find her keys, Miss Aura unlocked the desk which stood beyond the screen, below the crayon picture of her mother, between the windows that gave the sun. She carried the candle and set it

down; drew from the desk a small photograph, and held it to the fluttering light. It was an old photograph, dating back to the eighteen-sixties, and it had yellowed and faded so that the portrait seemed to retreat into a mist. The lad was like the wraith of a lad, and the soldier seemed to be the ghost of a soldier. Does young love become an apparition, appearing and disappearing through a long, preoccupied life, visiting the heart like a sweet and solemn mystery, cherished more by reverence than by passion, and becoming more a vision than a pain?

Sometimes Miss Aura may have thought so. That night she examined the picture of her soldier with an attention strangely energized and poignant. After she had laid the photograph back in the desk, she took it out again and lifted it to her lips, but most quietly, and without tears.

Then she went downstairs to comfort Emmyline, and they both sewed the rest of the evening for the missionary barrel. Aureola went late to bed, and slept soundly.

At four o'clock in the morning she awoke from a dreamless night. Beyond the salt-marshes the distant tide was rising. The June morning was broadening to a hot day. The birds were singing; the woodbine stirred against the window in a gentle wind. Dew was on the box, and the scent of the yellow roses in the garden came up delicately. Suddenly Miss Aura

remembered walking one day in the garden, but not alone, and the yellow roses brushed against her white dress and dashed it with gold. Then, too, beyond the marshes the distant tide was rising. That was thirty — no, that was almost forty years ago.

"Why, I suppose," she said aloud, "after all this while — I shall see Ralph."

She went downstairs with a strange emotion upon her. Her heart was not heavy, yet it did not lift as it did yesterday morning. She had put on a white dress by some impulse which she could not have explained, and Emmyline glanced at it, but without remark. She and Emmyline avoided each other's eyes; they talked of the thermometer and strawberries.

"I guess you 'll take it easy to-day," ventured Emmyline at last; "it 's goin' to be a scorcher."

"Oh, I 've got nothing at all to do to-day," replied Miss Aura, "only those checks to finish, and we 'll pack the missionary barrel and get it off, and I promised the Dawsons I 'd run over, — the baby 's sick, — and I feel somehow as if I ought to see Nan McDonald a minute; and I 'm due on the library committee and the Day Nursery and the Mothers' Rest. Oh, I said I 'd serve on the Mercy to Animals. But I really have nothing much to do. I promise you I 'll take it easy, Emmyline."

"Think so!" sniffed Emmyline. "Looks like it!

What 's Mis' McDonald gosgaddin' over this time o' day for, I 'd like to know? Folks says she has the second sight."

"It must be Nan," murmured Miss Aura, inaudibly. It usually was Nan. Nan was one of the too familiar products of our day — a girl who had got beyond her mother. Nobody could do much with Nan except Miss Aura. But when she saw the face of the Scotch mother that morning, Aureola's own blanched. She turned the key of the sitting-room, and the two women talked in low tones for an hour. Then, without consulting Emmyline, they went out together into the hot sun.

The sick woman had quite forgotten that she was not going to live a long time. Her beautiful face was absorbed and stern. She carried her head like St. Ursula, who protected eleven thousand virgins beneath her mantle.

Miss Aura had begun the first day of her "preparation for death" by a divine and delicate task which spent her, soul and body. She was trying to save a tempted girl from a married man.

It was full midsummer before any one said anything to Aureola about the autobiography. Then Mrs. Ranney asked abruptly one day: —

"Is it done?"

Miss Aura looked quite confused.

"Do you mean the Factory Library? It will be finished by the last of next week. If it 's the fund for the Mercy to Animals, no. It goes slowly this year. But I think I can make it up — almost."

"I *meant* that autobiography," said Mrs. Ranney, reproachfully. "I am a committee of your friends. I feel responsible."

"Oh, yes," replied Miss Aura, unexpectedly, "I 've begun the autobiography. In fact," she added, "I believe it 's about done."

"Pretty long?" demanded Mary Ranney. "You've known so many inter*est*ing things, and folks set so much by you."

"I 'll work some more on it to-night," said Miss Aura, guiltily.

That evening she locked herself into her room, drew from her desk a pile of manuscript, and slowly read it over several times. The manuscript ran thus:

MY AUTOBIOGRAPHY

I am glad I am alive.

I was born in Christmas week in the year 1845. This event occurred in the town of Glynn, and in the house that I now occupy.

My father said I was a very homely baby.

My mother said I cried steadily the first six weeks of my life.

I think I must have done up most of my crying in those six weeks.

The first time that I remember myself I was not crying. I was quite happy.

When I was ten I had the measles.

When I was sixteen I joined the church.

When I was nineteen there was a war.

When I was thirty I took the management of my factory.

Thus I became acquainted with my dear girls who work upon the shoes.

I have known many dear girls. I have known a great many lovely people.

I have had the best neighbors that any woman ever had in this or any other town.

I have had the dearest friends whom any person could have in this or any other world.

I have received more kindness than I can begin to remember, and more affection than I can possibly deserve.

Nobody living has ever done me a wrong.

I cannot remember that I ever hated any person. The nearest I ever came to it was once where a man tried to do a harm to a poor girl I knew. Then there was once when I saw a man beat a horse to death.

I thought I should enjoy writing this autobiography; but I find it very hard work.

It is the hardest work I ever did in my life. I did not know it was so hard to write.

Perhaps I could write better if I had some interesting subject.

I send my love to all my dear girls, and my neighbors and my boy cousins, and to everybody in Glynn.

I think I am too busy to write an autobiography. I have a great deal to do.

I have always had a great deal to do. I have always been very busy.

I have always been very happy. Not counting a few exceptional instances of no interest to any person but myself, I have been happy all my life.

I am glad that I have been alive. I would rather not die if I could help it; but I am glad that I have lived.

One day in the last week of October the young minister sat in his study trying to write a doctrinal sermon, because an important parishioner had complained that the pulpit was destitute of doctrinal sermons.

It was a bleak day; November had bitten in upon the soft flesh of a rich and tender autumn; there was a flurry of unseasonable snow in the air; before it the dead leaves were fleeing like unholy ghosts, and the wind came straight from the salt marshes.

The doctrinal sermon went hard. The minister

thought that if the important parishioner had not been one of those rich people who rule affairs in factory towns, he would have written instead a short sermon about the tenderness of Christ to sick people, which of late had been much in his mind.

He was not sorry to be interrupted in his reluctant work by the most unexpected caller whom the parsonage had entertained since the young man had occupied it. This was a more important parishioner than the man who demanded doctrinal sermons. It was, in fact, Miss Aura. She had never called upon the minister before, and he received her with proportional interest. She delayed somewhat in making known her errand, and he confided to her — everybody confided something to Miss Aura — his discomfort about the doctrinal sermon.

"Doctrinal fiddlesticks!" cried the lady.

"I agree with you perfectly," interrupted the minister. "But the commercial nature — he is in cotton, I believe," pursued the young student, vaguely.

"Who is he?" demanded Miss Aura, with a sudden reduction of tone.

The minister gave the name of the important parishioner.

Miss Aura's brows darkened to a visible, almost a savage frown. Evidently struggling to withhold explanation of her displeasure, she said shortly: —

"Put that sermon in the fire! Write one about

Pharisees and hypocrites! — I 've come," she added, with one of her swift and fascinating changes of manner, "to talk to you on a personal matter. I never did such a thing before. I never consulted a minister about myself in all my life."

"It must be a great exigency which has driven you to do so," answered the minister, quietly.

The tact and delicacy of this reply soothed Miss Aura so much that she felt ashamed of having expected to be met by anything else.

"Well, I suppose it is," she admitted, with strongly restrained emotion. "But I don't know how to begin, all the same."

"Don't try," urged the young pastor, gently. "Break into the middle of the subject; or the end, for that matter. It is possible that I understand without being told."

"Oh, I dare say," responded Miss Aura, wearily. "Everybody in town understood before I did. I can't get well. I suppose you know that. I 'm going to die. I am — going — to — die," she repeated. An expression of incredulous horror settled slowly upon every feature of her strong countenance; it was as if she threw off, rather than drew off, a mask which she had worn so long and so closely that it had clung to her flesh. Her face seemed to tear in the act. She did not look at the minister.

"I have lost strength," she resumed. "I am not as I

was last spring. I am weaker than I was in July. I may not live as long as I think I shall, as I thought I should. I understand it at last perfectly. I am going to die. I have got to a point where saying, 'I will live,' does n't amount to anything any more. I 've got to die, in spite of me. And I 'm not ready."

"Then I don't know who is," exclaimed the minister, warmly.

Miss Aura, who was expecting a homily on her spiritual condition, turned squarely around and presented fully to the young man an astonished and warring face on which the ravages of her malady were but lightly etched. Miss Aura was one of those people who look well till they are in their coffins.

"It is n't possible," she said in a very low voice, "that you really *understand.*"

"No," he replied; "it is not possible for me — a young fellow out of the seminary only a few years — to understand the strength, the beauty, the sanctity of a character like yours."

"Sanctity!" interrupted Miss Aura. "I have n't got a bit of sanctity. It 's nothing but sense."

"But I can understand that I do not understand," proceeded the minister, "and that may be something."

"You are a remarkable boy!" cried Miss Aura, with her own mischief, and smiling merrily. "Perhaps I was n't such a fool to come here, after all. You see, the trouble is, I have n't got time to get ready to

die. I 'm too busy. I have too much to do. I mean to, but I never can seem to catch up. I say: 'Now I will think about dying. I will pray a great deal more. I will read more chapters at night. I will sit down and make a business of getting ready for the next world.' I say: 'You 've *got* to go there. You 've *got* to make a decent appearance in that life you know no more about than that poor kitten we saved from the medical student at the Mercy to Animals last week knows how to write a doctrinal sermon. And yet you 've got to go there.' Oh!" with a break in her firm voice, "nobody knows. Nobody can. It 's only those that go through it that *can* understand. I would n't ask it of you. You could n't. You 're young and well, and a man and a minister. But don't you see I have taken it for granted that you know your business? Come! What did your professors teach you to say to a middle-aged woman who has n't got time to die?"

The clergyman slowly shook his head in silence.

"I understand the shoe business and factories," continued Miss Aura, "and shop-girls and sick neighbors; stray dogs — and all those things. I never was at a divinity school. You were. What will become of me if I never do catch up? There never was anybody, I do believe, who found so little time to think about her own soul. You see, there are so many other people — all my poor girls, and one in particular I

am very anxious about. Her mother and I take turns going out evenings to watch and see her get safely home. And then there are always so many people sick. And when I get to bed at last, I must own I 'm pretty tired — tireder than I was. Oh, I don't want any sympathy! I can stand suffering. I can stand anything but seeing other persons suffer. You know for yourself how much harder that is. But come now! I should like to know if I go crash into eternity some day, and have not time to do a single thing to get ready — what then? I suppose I 'll be blamed for it. I suppose I shan't be fit to enter good society — up there. Not if I go on this way. And I presume I shall. Probably I shall die with my head full of *things*. It 's cram-jam full now. Last at night, first at daybreak — for I don't sleep as I used to — *things!* Not religious things, you understand, nothing sacred, or divine, or that. Fancy going to heaven while you 're planning out a club supper for shop-girls, or trimming a hat for your cook, or sending letters to college boys who have got into a scrape, or — or writing checks for somebody. Or perhaps you 're chloroforming a diseased dog that nobody would keep and nobody would touch. Come! Out with it! What will become of me if I never have time to think about what you called my spiritual condition?"

"Did I ever call it names?" interposed the minister. "At any rate, I never will again."

"Do you think they 'll send me to hell?" added Miss Aura, whimsically. She spoke right on, as if she had not been interrupted.

"If they do, then I don't know anybody who will get to heaven," observed the inexperienced pastor. "I can't teach you, Miss Aura. I can't help you. You have taught me far too much. But it seems to me, if I were you, I would n't trouble. I would n't bother myself about these eschatological difficulties."

Miss Aura nodded comfortably.

"Yes, I know. Eschatology means last things. Why did n't you say so?" she added.

"I shall, next time," replied the young minister, humbly. He gave her his blessing, such as it was, and comforted her, as he could; and then the very young pastor had to send for the very young doctor suddenly, for the agitation of her first and last "spiritual" interview with a minister had been too much for Aureola. She slid quietly off the edge of her chair, and dropped upon the study floor.

She grew somewhat more amenable after this; followed advice, up to a point, and promised everybody with suspicious readiness that she would be careful.

When the old, the very old doctor said, "Aureola, you must put in a telephone," she put one in. When the young doctor (who afterwards found occasion to wish he had not) told her she must keep a horse, she

bought a horse. This she did without objection, because it provided a situation for Nan McDonald's brother Ja, and rides for half the invalids in town. But she got very tired entertaining the invalids, so she used to stay at home and let Ja drive them out without her. In fact, Aureola, as everybody could see, was "losing," but nobody dared to tell her so. They were afraid she would take on some terrible spurt of self-denial, and waste herself. She moved through what remained to her of time, like the old Greek racer who ran and carried fire, holding her torch above her head. She worked as if she expected annihilation. The Christian doctrine of eternal life seemed to have gone out of her mind. One would have thought, who observed the woman, that the present moment was the last chance to exist, and that existence meant nothing whatever but the relief of other people's miseries. Of the enthusiasm of humanity Aureola had made an art, as another paints or writes or sings.

She spent herself with a divine fervor, behind which there was something of the deliberation and calm pertaining always to art. While she seemed most mad she was most sane. Thus the autumn went with her, and winter found her weakened, radiant, and surcharged with loving activities. Then there happened that which is recalled in Glynn to this day with hushed voices and brimming eyes.

One night in late December Miss Aura was lying

on the sofa downstairs, pale and peaceful, her noble day's work done, and her hard night before her, — for she battled much for breath when she should have slept, — when voices were heard wrestling in the hall: that of Emmyline, strident, imperious, denying; that of another, pleading and claiming admission with a note of anguish which brought Aureola's feet to the floor in an instant. She called Emmyline peremptorily.

"It 's that everlastin', never-dyin' Mis' McDonald gosgaddin' over here in a snow-storm after you," cried Emmyline, with holy anger. "Talk about second sight! First sight of you would teach her to leave you be. You 're a-murderin' of Miss Orry!" blazed Emmyline, turning upon the Scotchwoman.

But Miss Aura, when her compassionate eyes had met the mother's, said: "Emmyline, bring my furs and sleighing-hood. Tell Ja to put Peter into the double sleigh. I am going out, Emmyline. Do you understand? *I am going.*"

By this time Annie McDonald had thrust out a hand from whose shaking grasp a bit of paper fluttered to the floor. Even then she allowed Miss Aura to stoop and pick it up herself. It was a half-sheet of pink, perfumed note-paper, torn and stained, wet with snow and tears; it contained, in a few words, one of the most piteous outcries of this sad world — the farewell of a ruined girl to her mother.

"He took her in a sleigh," said the Scotchwoman, dully. "They 've driven yander to the meshes. I see them dashin' by. I called after the mon for the luve of heaven an' her mither — but he 's got her in the sleigh."

"I 'll get *him* in a sleigh!" answered Miss Aura. Her voice was terrible, and so was her face. With this undramatic comment she passed the dramatic moment — flung on her furs, brushed the mother aside, pushed Emmyline off, ran out into the snow, herself helping Ja to get the heavy harness on, and whirled away with the lad into the storm. She took two whips; one she kept in her own hand.

"An' for what should we be goin' to the meshes?" complained Ja, stupid and rebellious, after the manner of his kind when the unexpected occurs. Although the storm was assuming the windpipe of a blizzard, Miss Aura put her lips to the boy's ear, and whispered what she had to say, so careful was she of long habit about the reputation of a girl. Of the worst in town no person had ever heard Miss Aura repeat a severe or slighting word.

Now, indeed, the lad set his teeth and laid the whip on the horse. The sleigh sped into the throat of the storm. Miss Aura said nothing more. She drew her sleighing-hood far over her face. Once or twice Ja heard her gasp. Only once she cried: —

"Turn around — quick — a minute!"

Ja turned and got her back to the wind till she could recall her breath. Her lips were purple, and her cheeks. She went so far as to say: —

"Wait a *min*ute longer!"

Then they turned and dashed on. The snow, though it slew the breath and froze the blood, was light, and accumulated slowly. Miss Aura's handsome sleigh flew down the long marsh road like an aëroplane. She crouched under the fox robe and tried to hold it up to her throat. But the inability to use her arms prevented; these dropped, and the robe with them; it slid to her knees. She had laid the whip upon the robe. The salt wind drove from the sea; it seemed to her as if it drove into her soul.

"Blank him to blank!" yelled the lad, suddenly. "I see him! I see 'em! I see 'em in a cutter yander down acrost the bridge!"

Ja stood up in the sleigh, lashing and swearing. Praying and crying, Miss Aura clutched her extra whip, and the president of the Mercy to Animals, she who would go twenty miles to find an abused kitten, she who treated her horse like a younger brother, who babied and spoiled him past the lot of any other horse in town, brought down the whip, the *second* whip, on Peter's quivering flank, and overtook the cutter just beyond the bridge.

It will never be known just how she did it, but somehow she rode the fellow down, hurled herself out,

and barred his way, standing straight and tall across the road. Before he could collect himself, she had her hand on the bridle.

"Come, Nan," she said quietly.

There was a street lamp just there, — the rough town kept the lonely marsh road lighted in self-defense, — and the flickering kerosene gave a sight of the Scotch girl, pale and pretty, weak of mouth, warm of eyes, a poor creature, to be spoiled and flung away.

It gave, too, a swift and cowardly vision of the man, whose wife trusted him, whose children loved him, whose neighbors honored him, whose church deferred to him. He, indeed, was the important parishioner who demanded doctrinal sermons.

Miss Aura stood, as we say, very straight and tall. She had her St. Ursula look. She was divinely beautiful and divinely angry.

With her weakened arms she raised her extra whip and brought the lash down on the neck and cheek of the important parishioner, once, twice, and perhaps again. And the brother of the girl, without staying to ask permission, joined in from behind with the other whip.

"Come, Nan," Miss Aura spoke again. "Come home with me to your mother."

She held out her hand. Nan took it with hanging head, and followed the lady like a dog.

"I 'm sorry, Peter," panted Miss Aura. She laid her shaking hand on her sweating and astounded horse. "It was between you and the girl. We'll drive home slowly, Peter."

Now, in fact, they drove home very slowly, for neither Nan nor Ja expected to get Miss Aura home at all. But her indomitable spirit served her, and Emmyline, crying silently and savagely, was there to meet them at the end of the path, where the snow lay on the box borders. Emmyline had telephoned for the young doctor, and he and Ja carried Miss Aura in and up to her own bed.

There she lay quietly for a few days, disturbed at first when she found she could not get up and go to the fair for the Mercy to Animals; but she accepted this disappointment cheerily, as she had all the others of her life.

It was left for the very old doctor, after all, to tell her — he who had brought her into the world and helped her parents out of it. One evening she was looking at the crayon portrait of her mother above the desk where the misty photograph was locked, when a face, with the accumulated pity of more than four-score beneficent years upon it, bent over the bed.

"Why, doctor!" said Aureola. "I thought you had a bad cold. You should n't have come out in the night air to see *me*. What did you do it for?"

But she perceived, as soon as she asked, what he did it for.

"Doctor," asked Miss Aura, "is *this* it?"

The old doctor nodded without speaking, and turned his face away.

"Oh, very well," replied Aureola, gently. She thought she heard some one crying, and looking about, was astonished to see how many people were in the room.

Mary Ranney was there. She stood looking over the screen. Her square face, with last summer's freckles still upon it, appeared strange to Miss Aura, like a big bodiless cherub that was overgrown. The Scotchwoman was there, but she showed no face at all, having buried it in the bedclothes where she knelt at the foot of the bed. Somewhere, quite out of sight in the hall or on the stairs, a girl was sobbing.

The young doctor was there, and the young minister. Emmyline was there. She sat on the other side of the bed, jealously holding one of Miss Aura's hands in her thin, hard fingers. Oddly it occurred to Aureola at the moment how pleased Emmyline had always been because she wore a size smaller glove than her mistress did. Emmyline sat in profile, and that brought out her stoop.

Rob was there, too. Miss Aura became aware that the boy was sitting out of sight and had his arm

about her, behind the pillows. She had treated all those boys alike, but only Rob had cared enough to come.

"Why, Rob," she said, "you 're spoiling your vacation — for me!"

But she was pleased that he was there, for the power of kin is strong, and the love of kin is precious at the end of life. "No debts this term, Rob?" she whispered. "That 's good, dear."

Miss Aura looked all around the room; her eyes, quite clear and strong, moved to the faces of her friends each in turn. Suddenly her lips twitched, and she laughed.

"It looks like the 'Death-bed of Calvin,' or 'Last Hours of Daniel Webster.' Doctor, do give them — a better pose."

Then she beckoned to the minister.

"I told you so," she complained. "I said I should go crash into eternity, doing something I should n't. And here I am laughing! Besides," she added, "I did a dreadful thing. I got dreadfully angry. I horsewhipped — a — man."

"I honor you for it!" replied the young pastor.

"I hope I did n't hurt him — very much," panted Miss Aura. "I did n't mean to. But I think he 'll keep away from her — now — don't you?"

Then her mind returned persistently to the thoughts that had been troubling her, touching her own unfit-

ness for the life invisibly to be; and she detained the young minister to ask: —

"What have you got to say to me? You ought to know your trade. You must see that I 've been too busy. I have never had time to make preparation for death. To-night I have n't even read my chapter. Where 's Nan? " she asked anxiously. "I thought Nan was in the house. She has n't gone out — sleigh-riding — has she?"

Somebody called Nan. She came in with hanging head, and knelt instinctively. The college boy made way for her, moving to the other side, where Emmyline was, and Miss Aura feebly put her arm around Nan's neck.

"The Lord bless them and keep them — my poor girls — for I can't. I can't do it any longer, Nan," said St. Ursula.

After this she spoke a little about her shop-girls, and the Mercy to Animals; tried to say what she wanted done for Emmyline, and the Factory Library, and for Peter, and for some of her poorest people.

But she soon ceased to try to talk much. She made it understood that she wished the desk-drawer unlocked and the manuscript autobiography taken therefrom. This she put into Mrs. Ranney's hands.

"I 'm sorry it is n't longer, Mary Ranney," she apologized; "but I found it — very hard work."

The night was long, and more air was needed in the room. The old doctor sent some of the neighbors away.

The night was long and the conflict strong. Miss Aura did not die like a weak person. Yet those who loved her best said afterward that it was the happiest passing they had ever seen. She treated death as she had treated life — like a great opportunity, and a glad one.

"Are you sure this is it?" she repeated to the old doctor. "I have often suffered more than this — a great deal more."

"You ought to tell people," she managed to add, "that dying is easier than living. Tell them I said how easy it is. It might be of use to — somebody," she urged, anxious to give comfort, anxious to save pain to the very end.

She did not say anything more about her religious views, or her personal feeling concerning the great event which was upon her. A certain reserve which was natural to her in such matters exhibited itself, as it always had. Once she asked for her mother's Bible, and Rob put it into her hand. She laid her cheek upon it and kept it there.

As the cold night moved solemnly toward daybreak, and the tide turned on the salt-marshes, she found that she did not see plainly. Only Emmyline's face remained visible to her. The old servant was the last

person whom she saw — Emmyline sitting in profile, with her stoop.

At three in the morning, at the ebb of the tide, Miss Aura said suddenly and quite distinctly: —

"Why, Ralph! Why, *Ralph!*"

But nobody knew what she meant, and the two doctors said she wandered.

When the Scotchwoman, who had the second sight, came out of her own house to go back to the other in the freezing dawn (for she could not stay away), she stood still in the snow with a sudden stricture at the heart, half of awe and half of fright — for there, she said, she met Miss Orry walking down the path between the box borders that her mother had planted. Beside her, the Scotchwoman always told, there walked a lad. His face was the face of a soldier lad beneath an army cap.

"An' the twa gaed doon the road thegither an' went their way beyand the een of me."

When the young doctor heard this he smiled; but the young minister pondered.

Now, when Mary Ranney came to read over the autobiography of Aureola, she found it very short and all unfinished, as we have seen. It set forth the facts that Miss Aura was born, as she died, in Christmas week, that she had the measles, that she joined the church, that when she was nineteen there was a war,

that she sent her love to all her dear girls, that she had been always quite busy and very happy, that no person had ever done her a wrong, nor had she hated any person, and that she was glad she was alive.

Like the sacred book of the Apocalypse, nothing had been added, nor could be, to this brief record of the dearest and noblest life that the people of Glynn had ever known.

Aureola might have read her beautiful biography written in their hearts; and heart biographies are the only true ones, as we know.

For they poured out on the day of Miss Aura's burial (it was a brilliant day and warm) like the tide overwhelming the marshes, a strong, impulsive force of human love and grief such as any other artist might have envied from his soul — they who write, or paint, or sing, and live and die, perhaps, starved for love and frozen for its evidence. She who had been this other kind of artist, she who had the passion of humanity and the genius for it, and the will to perfect herself in it, went to her grave right royally. A throng followed her, not weeping much, — because, if she had taught them anything, she had taught them cheerfulness and self-restraint, — but looking bereft and awed; the mill-people, the very poor, the overlooked, the cross-grained and the sick, the unpopular, the tempted, and the unhappy; lonely people, and poor girls whom no one else befriended.

Far behind them all one walked, veiled, with drooping head, but holding tight her mother's hand.

And Emmyline rode with Rob among the relatives. Emmyline felt fiercely that she was the only real mourner of them all. Who else knew how precious Miss Aura could be every day? For the shared life is the test of love and the measure of loss.

A CHARIOT OF FIRE

WHEN the White Mountain express to Boston stopped at Beverly, it slowed up reluctantly, crashed off the baggage, and dashed on with the nervousness of a train that is unmercifully and unpardonably late.

It was a September night, and the channel of homebound summer travel was clogged and heaving.

A middle-aged man — a plain fellow, who was one of the Beverly passengers — stood for a moment staring at the tracks. The danger-light from the rear of the onrushing train wavered before his eyes, and looked like a splash of blood that was slowly wiped out by the night. It was foggy, and the atmosphere clung like a sponge.

"No," he muttered, "it 's the other way. Batty 's the other way."

He turned, facing towards the branch road which carries the great current of North Shore life.

"How soon can I get to Gloucester?" he demanded of one who brushed against him heavily. He who answered proved to be of the baggage staff, and was at that moment skillfully combining a frown and a whistle behind a towering truck; from this two trunks

and a dress-suit case threatened to tumble on a bull-terrier leashed to something invisible, and yelping in the darkness behind.

"Lord! This makes 'leven dogs, cats to burn, twenty-one baby-carriages, *and* a guinea-pig travelin' over this blamed road since yesterday. — What 's that? *Gloucester?* — 6.45 to-morrow morning."

"Oh, but look here!" cried the plain passenger, "that won't do. I have got to get to Gloucester *to-night.*"

"So 's this bull-terrier," groaned the baggage-handler. "He got switched off without his folks — and I 've got a pet lamb in the baggage-room bleatin' at the corporation since dinner-time. Some galoot forgot the crittur. There 's a lost parrot settin' alongside that swears in several foreign languages. I wish to Moses I could!"

The passenger experienced the dull surprise of one in acute calamity who wonders that another man can jest. He turned without remark, and went to the waiting-room; he limped a little, for he was slightly lame. The ticket-master was locking the door of the office, and looked sleepy and fagged.

"Where 's the train to Gloucester?"

"Gone."

"'T ain't *gone?*"

"Gone half an hour ago."

The official pointed to the clock, on whose face an

ominous expression seemed to rest, and whose hands marked the hour of half-past twelve.

"But I have got to get to Gloucester!" answered the White Mountain passenger. "We had a naccident. We 're late. I ain't much used to travelin'. — I supposed they 'd wait for us. I tell you I 've *got* to get there."

In his agitation he gripped the arm of the other, who threw the grasp off instinctively.

"You 'll have to walk, then. You can't get anything now till the newspaper train."

"God!" gasped the belated passenger. "I 've got a little boy. He 's dying."

"Sho!" said the ticket-master. "That 's too bad. Can you afford a team? You might *try* the stables. There 's one or two around here."

The ticket-master locked the doors of the station and walked away, but did not go far. A humane uneasiness disturbed him, and he returned to see if he could be of any use to the afflicted passenger.

"I 'll show you the way to the nearest," be began kindly.

But the man had gone.

In the now dimly lighted town square he was, in fact, zigzagging about alone, with the loping gait of a lame man in a feverish hurry.

"There must be hosses," he muttered, "and places. — Why, yes. Here 's one, first thing."

Into the livery-stable he entered so heavily that he seemed to fall in. His cheap straw hat was pushed back from his head; he was flushed, and his eyes were too bright; his hair, which was red and coarse, lay matted on his forehead.

"I want a team," he began, on a high, sharp key. "I 've got to get to Gloucester. The train 's gone."

A sleepy groom, who scowled at him, turned on a suspicious heel. "You 're drunk. It 's fourteen miles. It would cost you more 'n you 're worth."

"I 've got a little boy," repeated the lame man. "He 's dying."

The groom wheeled back. "That so? Why, that 's a pity. I 'd like to 'commodate you. See? I 'm here alone — see? I darsen't go so far without orders. Boss is home and abed."

"He got hurt in a naccident," pleaded the father. "I come from up to Conway. I went to bury my uncle. They sent me a telegraph about my little boy. I ain't drunk. They sent me the telegraph. I 've got to get home."

"I 'll let you sleep here along of me," suggested the groom, "but I darsen't leave. I 'm responsible to the boss. There 's other places you might get one. I 'll show you. See? I 'd try 'em all if I was you."

But again the man was gone.

By the time that he had found another stable his manner had changed; he had become deprecating,

servile. He entreated, he trembled; he flung his emergency at the feet of the watchman; he reiterated his phrase: —

"I 've got a little boy, if you please. He 's dying. I 've got to get to Gloucester — I live in Squam."

"I don't like to refuse you," protested the night-watchman, "but two of my horses are lame, and one is plumb used up carrying summer folks. I 'm dreadful short. I have n't a team to my name I could put on the road to Gloucester. It 's — why, to Squam it 's seventeen miles — thirty-four the round trip. It would cost you — "

"I 'll pay!" cried the lame man; "I 'll pay. I ain't beggin'."

"I 'm sorry I have n't got a horse," apologized the watchman. "It would cost you ten dollars if I had. But I hain't."

"Ten *doll*ars?" The traveler echoed the words stupidly.

"I 'm sorry; fact, I am," urged the watchman. "Won't you set 'n' rest a spell?"

But the visitor had vanished from the office.

Twenty minutes after, the doorbell of a home in the old residence portion of the town rang violently and pealed through the sleeping house.

It was a comfortable, not a new-fashioned, house, sometimes leased to summer citizens, and modernized in a measure for their convenience; one of the few of

its kind within reach of the station, and by no means near.

When the master of the family had turned on all the burglar electricity and could get the screen up, he put his head out of the window, and so perceived on his doorstep a huddled figure with a white, uplifted face.

A shaking voice came up:—

"Sir? Be you a gentleman?"

"I hope so," went down the quiet reply. "But I can't remember that I was ever asked that question at this time of morning before."

"Be you a Christian?" insisted the voice from below.

"Sometimes — perhaps," went down the voice from above.

The voice from below came up: "Sir! Sir! I 'm in great trouble. For the love of Christ, sir, come down, quick!"

"Why, of course," said the voice from above.

The man stood quite still when the great bolts of the door shot through their grooves. Against a background of electric brilliance he saw a gentleman in pajamas and bath-robe, with slippers as soft as a lady's on his white feet. The face of the gentleman was somewhat fixed and guarded; his features were carefully cut, behind their heavy coat of seaside tan.

"Well," he said, "that was a pretty solemn adjuration. What is it?"

"I want to get a team," stammered the figure on the steps. Suddenly, somehow, his courage had begun to falter. He felt the enormity of his intrusion. He came up against the mystery of social distinctions; his great human emergency seemed to be distanced by the little thing men call difference of class.

"You want — to get — a team?" repeated the gentleman; he spoke slowly, without irritation. "You have made a mistake. This is not a livery-stable."

"Livery-stable!" cried the intruder, with a swift and painful passion. "I 've tried three! Fust one had n't any boss. Next one had n't any hoss. It was ten dollars if he had. Last one wanted 'leven dollars, pay in advance. I 've got four dollars 'n' sixteen cents in my pocket. I 've been up to Conway to bury my uncle. My folks sent me a telegraph. My little boy — he 's had a naccident. My train was late. I 've *got* to get to Gloucester, sir. So I thought," added the traveler, simply, "I 'd ask one the neighbors. Neighbors is most gener'lly kind. Up our way they be. Sir — could you let me have a team to see my little boy before — in case — he dies?"

"Come inside a minute," replied the gentleman.

The words, which had begun shortly, ended softly. "Perfectly sober," he thought. His fingers stole to

the button of a bell as the stranger stepped into the hall.

"Yes — I 'll send you over. What 's your name?"

"Dryver, sir. Jacob Dryver."

"Where do you live?"

"Squam."

"Annisquam? That is several miles beyond Gloucester. Your trouble is too swift for horses. I have rung for my chauffeur. I 'll send you in the automobile. Be so good as to step around to the stables, Mr. Dryver. I 'll join you outside."

Now the voice of a sleepy child could be heard overhead; it seemed to be trying to say, "Popper! Popper!" A woman's figure drifted to the top of the padded stairs. The intruder caught a gleam of delicate white drapery floating with laces, closely gathered at the throat, and held with one ringed hand — as if hastily thrown on. The door shut, and the bolts shot again. Jacob Dryver felt that he was at once trusted and distrusted; he could not have said why he did not go to the stables, but sat down on the broad granite steps. His knees hung apart; his elbows dropped to them; his face fell into his hands.

The child above continued to call: "Popper! Popper!" Then the little voice trailed away.

"It 's smaller 'n Batty," Jacob said.

When he lifted his head from his hands, up the curving avenue a steam-carriage was sweeping upon

him. Its acetylene lanterns blazed like the eyes of some prehistoric thing; but this simple fellow knew nothing about prehistoric things. The lanterns reminded him of the living creatures that Ezekiel saw. Such imagination as he had was Biblically trained, and leaped from Ezekiel to Elijah easily.

"It 's a chariot of fire," thought Jacob Dryver, "comin' for to carry me home."

As he gathered himself and went to meet the miracle, a dark figure, encased in rubber armor from foot to head, brought the carriage to a swift and artistic stop.

"Are you the shove-her?" asked Jacob, timidly.

"I am not the shove-her," replied the figure at the brake, "and I hope I sha'n't have to be. I am Mr. Chester. My chauffeur is not at home, I find. I shall drive you to Annisquam myself."

"You 're takin' some trouble, sir," said Jacob, slowly. His head reeled. He felt that he was growing stupid under the whirlwind of events. He went down the long steps like a lame blind man. As he did so, the bolts of the door behind him leaped back again, and the lady ran down and slid into the carriage. The fog glittered on the laces of her white woolen garment. Her husband thought of it as a negligée; but Jacob called it a wrapper. She was a dainty lady, and fair to look upon; her hair lay in long, bright braids upon her shoulders; she had caught up an

automobile coat and cap, which she flung across her arm. Dryver heard her say: "I shall be — a little anxious. After all, you know nothing about him. May n't I go?"

"And leave Bert? I don't think I would, Mary. I 've told James to sit up and watch. Draw the big bolt on top and keep the lights all on. If I have good luck, I shall be back in less than two hours. Good-by, Mary — dear."

The last word lingered with the caressing accent which only long-tried marriage love ever puts into it. The lips of the two met silently, and drooping, the lady melted away. Jacob Dryver found himself in the steam-carriage, speeding down the avenue to the silent street. He looked back once at the house. Every pane of glass was blazing, as if the building were on fire.

"You 'll find it colder than you expect," observed Mr. Chester. "I brought along Thomas's coat. Put it on — and *hold* on. Never in one of these before, were you?"

"N-no, sir," chattered Jacob Dryver. "Thank you, sir. I n-never was."

He clung to the side of the seat desperately. In fact, he was very much frightened. But he would have gone under the heavy wheels before he would have owned it. Spinning through the deserted Beverly streets, the carriage took what seemed to him a startling pace.

"I 'm going slowly till we get out of town," remarked Mr. Chester. "Once on the Manchester road, I 'll let her out a bit."

Jacob made no reply. What had seemed to be fog drenched and drowned him now like driving rain. There had been no wind, but now the powers and principalities of the air were let loose. He gasped for breath, which was driven down his throat. That made him think of Batty, whom for the moment he had actually forgotten. When people died — they could not — Had Batty — by this time — it was so long — should he find that Batty —

"What ails your boy?" asked the half-invisible figure from the depths of its rubber armor.

"I had a telegraph," said Jacob, monotonously. "I never was away from home so far — I ain't used to travelin'. I supposed the train would wait for the accident. The telegraph said he was hurt bad. I got it just as the fun'ril was leavin' the house. I had to quit it, corpse 'n' all — for Batty. I ran all the way to the depot. I just got aboard, and here I be becalmed all night — and there is Batty. — His name is Batwing," added the father. "He was named after the uncle I went to bury. But we call him Batty."

"Any more children?" inquired Mr. Chester, in the cultivated, compassionate voice which at once attracted and estranged the breaking heart of Jacob Dryver.

"We have n't only Batty, sir," he choked.

The hand on the lever tightened; the throttle opened; the dark figure in the rubber coat bent and its muscles turned to iron. The carriage began to rock and fly. It was now whirling out upon the silent, sleeping road that goes by the great houses of the North Shore.

"I 'll let her out a little," said Mr. Chester, quietly. "Don't worry. We 'll get there before you know it."

The carriage took on a considerable pace. Jacob's best straw hat flew off; but he did not mention it. His red hair stood endwise, all ways, on his head; his eyes started; his hands gripped — one at the rail, one at the knee of his companion. The wind raised by the motion of the car became a gale, and forced itself into his lungs. Jacob gasped, —

"It 's — on account — of Batty."

"I have a little boy of my own," observed Mr. Chester. Plainly thinking to divert the attention of the anguished father, he continued: "*He* had an accident this summer — he was hurt by a scythe; he slipped away from his nurse. He was pretty badly hurt. I was away — I hurried from Bar Harbor to get to him. I think I know how you feel."

"Did you have a telegraph, sir?" asked Dryver, rousing to the throb of the common human pulse.

"Yes, there was a telegram. But I was a good while getting it. I understand your position."

"Did he ever get over it — your little boy? Oh, I

see; that was him I heard. 'Popper,' he says, — 'Popper.'"

Above the whir of the steam-carriage, above the chatter of the exhaust, above the voice of the wind, the sound of a man's muffled groan came distinctly to the ear that was fine enough to hear it.

"Trust me," said Chester, gently. "I 'll get you there. I 'll get you to your boy."

The gentleman's face was almost as white now as Jacob Dryver's. The fog glistened upon his mustache and made him look a gray-haired man as he emerged from gulfs of darkness and shot by widely scattered dim street lamps. Both men had acquired something of the same expression — the rude face and the finished one; both wore the solemn, elemental look of fatherhood. The heart of one repeated piteously, —

"It 's Batty."

But the other thought, "What if it were Bert?"

"I 'll let her out a little more," repeated Chester. The carriage throbbed and rocked to the words.

"How do you like my machine?" he added, in a comfortable voice. He felt that the mercury of emotion had mounted too far. "Mrs. Chester has named her," he proceeded. "We call her Aurora."

"Hey?"

"We 've named the machine Aurora, I said."

" 'Roarer,' sir?"

"Oh, well. That will do — 'Roarer,' if you like.

That is n't bad. It 's an improvement, perhaps. By the way, how did you happen on my place to-night? There are a good many nearer the station; you had quite a walk."

"I see a little pair o' reins an' bells in the grass alongside — such as little boys play horse with. We had one once for Batty, sir."

"*Ah!* Was that it? What 's your business, Dryver? You have n't told me. Do you fish?"

"Winters, I make paving-stones. Summers, I raise vegetables," replied Jacob Dryver. "I 'm a kind of a quarry-farmer. My woman she plants flowers for the summer folks, and Batty bunches 'em up and delivers 'em. Batty — he — God! My God! Mebbe there *ain't any Batty* —"

The sentence broke. In truth, it would have been hard to find its remnants in the sudden onset of sound made by the motion of the machine.

The car was freed now to the limit of her mighty strength. She took great leaps like those of a living heart that is over-excited. Powerfully, perfectly, without let or hindrance, without flaw or accident, the chariot of fire bounded through the night. A trail of steam like the tail of a comet followed her. The dark scenery of the guarded shore flew by; Montserrat was behind; Prides was gone; the Farms blew past.

They were now well out upon the beautiful, silent Manchester road, where the woods, solemn at noon-

day, are something else than that at dead of night. The steam-carriage, flying through them, encountered no answering sign of life. Both men had ceased to speak. Awe fell upon them, as if in the presence of more than natural things. Once it seemed to Dryver as if he saw a boy running beside the machine — a little fellow, white, like a spirit, and, like a spirit, silent. Chester's hands had stiffened to the throttle; his face had the stern rigidity of those on whom life or human souls absolutely depend. Neither man spoke now aloud. To himself Jacob Dryver repeated:

"It 's Batty. It 's my Batty."

And Hurlburt Chester thought, "What if it were Bert?"

Now the great arms of the sea began to open visibly before them. The fog on their lips grew salter, and they seemed to have entered the Cave of the Winds. Slender beach and sturdy headland slid by. West Manchester, Manchester, Magnolia, rushed past. In the Magnolia woods they lost the sea again; but the bell-buoy called from Norman's Woe, and they could hear the moan of the whistling-buoy off Eastern Point. In the Cape Ann Light the fog-bell was tolling.

At the pace which the car was taking there was an element of danger in the situation which Jacob Dryver could not measure, since he feared safety ignorantly, and met peril with composure. Chester

reduced the speed a little, and yet a little more, but pushed on steadily. Once Jacob spoke.

"I 'll bet your shove-her could n't drive like you do," he said proudly.

Fresh Water Cove slipped by; Old Stage Fort was behind; — the Aurora bumped over the pavement of the Cut, and reeled through the rough and narrow streets of Gloucester. He of Beverly was familiar with the route, and asked no questions. The car, now tangled among electric tracks, swung around the angle from Main Street carefully, jarred across the railroad, and took the winding, dim road to Annisquam.

Bay View flew behind — the bridge — the village — the pretty arcade known as Squam Willows. The carriage dashed into it and out of it as if it were a tunnel. Then Dryver gripped the other's arm and, without a word, pointed.

The car followed the guidance of his shaking finger, and, like a conscious creature, swung to a startling stop.

There were lights in the quarryman's cottage, and shadows stirred against drawn shades. Jacob Dryver tumbled out and ran. He did not speak, nor by a gesture thank his Beverly "neighbor." Chester slowly unbuttoned his rubber coat and got at his watch. The Aurora had covered the distance — in dark and fog, over seventeen miles — in fifty-six minutes. Now

Jacob, dashing in, had left the door open, and Chester, as he put his watch back into its pocket, heard that which sent the blood driving through his arteries as the power had driven the pumps of the car. The sound that he heard was the fretful moan of a hurt child.

As he had admitted, he was a Christian — sometimes; and he said, "Oh, thank God!" with all his generous heart. Indeed, as he did so, he took off his heavy cap and bared his head.

Then he heard the sobbing of a shaken man close beside him.

"Sir! Oh, sir! The God of Everlastin' bless you, sir. Won't you come and look at him?"

Batty lay quietly; he had put his little fingers in his father's hand; he did not notice the stranger. The boy's mother, painfully poised on one elbow in the position that mothers take when they watch sick children, lay upon the other side of the bed. She was a large woman, with a plain, good face. She had on a polka-dotted, blue cotton wrapper, which nobody called a negligée. Her mute, maternal eyes went to the face of the visitor, and reverted to the child.

There was a physician in the room — a very young, to the trained eye an inexperienced, man. In fact, the medical situation was unpromising and complicated. It took Chester but a few moments to gauge it, and to

perceive that his mission to this afflicted household had not ended with a lost night's sleep and an automobile record.

The local doctor, it seemed, was away from home when Batty's accident befell; the Gloucester surgeon was ill; some one had proposed the hospital, but the mother had the prejudices of her class. A neighbor had suggested this young man — a newcomer to the town — one of the flotsam practitioners who drift and disappear. Recommended upon the ground that he had successfully prescribed headache pills to a Swedish cook, this stranger had received into his unskilled hands the emergency of a dangerously wounded lad. The accident, in fact, was more serious than Chester had supposed. He had now been told that the child was crushed by a carriage steaming through Annisquam Willows the day before.

The boy, it was plain, was sorely hurt, and ignorant suffering lay at the mercy of ignorant treatment, in the hopeless and helpless subjection to medical etiquette which costs so many lives.

"Dryver," said Chester, quietly, "you need a surgeon here at once. Your physician is quite willing to consult with any one you may call." He shot one stern glance at the young doctor, who quavered a frightened assent. "I know a distinguished surgeon — he is a friend of mine; it was he who saved *my* boy in that accident I told you of, this summer. He is not

far away; he is at a hotel on Eastern Point. I can have him here in twenty — well, say twenty-five minutes. Of course we must wait for him to dress."

The woman raised her head and stared upon the gentleman. One swift, brilliant gleam shot from her heavy eyes. She had read of angels in the Bible. She had noticed, indeed, that they were men angels. But she had never heard of one in a rubber touring-coat, drenched from head to foot with fog, spattered from foot to head with mud, and with a wedding-ring upon his fine hand.

Jacob Dryver began: "Sir! The God of Everlastin' —" but he sobbed so that he could not finish what he would have said. So Chester went out and watered the Aurora, opened the throttle, and started off again, and dashed through the rude streets of Gloucester to her summer shore.

Dawn was rose-gray over Eastern Point, and the tide had turned upon the harbor, when the "Roarer" curved up quietly to the piazza of the hotel.

It was gray-rose upon Annisquam, and the tide was rising up the river, when the great surgeon went into the little place where the lad lay fighting for his mangled life. There had been some delay in rousing the sleeper — it was a trip of six rough miles twice taken — and it was thirty-five minutes before his "merciless merciful" hands went to work upon the mortal need of the boy.

The child had been crushed across the hips and body, and only an experienced or only an eminent skill could have saved the little fellow.

In the blossoming day Jacob Dryver limped out and stood in the front yard among his wife's flowers that Batty "bunched up" and sold to summer people. He could not perceive the scent of the flowers — only that of the ether. His big boot caught in a sweet-pea vine and tore it. One of the famous carmine dahlias of Cape Ann seemed to turn its large face and gaze at him.

An old neighbor — a cross-eyed lobsterer, going to his traps — came by, cast a shrewd look, and asked how the boy was. Jacob did not reply to the lobsterer; he lifted his wet eyes to the sky; then they fell to a bed of blazing nasturtiums, which seemed to smoke before them. His lips tried to form the words which close like a strangling hand upon the throat of the poor in all the emergencies of life. Till he has answered this question, a poor man may not love a woman or rear a child; he may not bury his dead or save his living.

"*What will it cost?*" asked Jacob Dryver. He looked piteously at the great surgeon, whose lips parted to speak. But Hurlburt Chester raised an imperious hand.

"That," he said, "is my affair."

It was broad, bright day when the Aurora came whirring home. Chester nodded to his wife at the window, but went directly to the stables. It was a little longer than she expected before he returned. She waited at the head of the stairs; then hurried half-way down to meet him. Her white robe was ungirdled and flowing; it fell apart — the laces above from the laces below, — and the tired man's kiss fell upon her soft throat.

She was naturally a worrier in a sweet-natured way, but he had always been patient with her little weakness; some men are, with anxious women.

"No," he smiled, but rather feebly; "you've missed it again. The boy is saved. St. Clair's got hold of him. I 'll talk presently, Mary, — not just now."

In fact, he would say no more till he had bathed and taken food. He looked so exhausted that she brought his breakfast to his bed, serving it with her own hands, and asking no questions at all; for, although she worried, she was wise. She sent for the baby, too, — a big baby, three years old, — and Chester enfolded the chin of the child in his slender brown hand silently.

Then he said: "Lock the door, Mary. I 've something to tell you."

When she had drawn the brass bolt and returned, somewhat pale herself with wonder and alarm, to the side of the bed, her husband spoke abruptly: —

"Mary, you 've got to know it — may as well have it over. I found this pinned on the stable wall. It was the Aurora that ran over the — that — that poor little fellow."

His hand shook as he laid the piece of paper in her own. And while she read it he covered his face; for he was greatly overworn, and the strain which he had undergone seemed now to have leaped again with the spring of a creature that one supposes one has left lifeless behind.

Mrs. Chester read the writing and laid it down. It ran like this: —

"Mr. Chester, Sir, Ime goin away while I can. It was me run over that boy while you was in town. I took Her out for a spin. I let Her out some racin with another one in the Willows an he got under Her someways. I see it in the papers so I was afraid of manslorter. Ime awful cut up about it so Ime goin to lite out while I can.

Your obedient servant,

THOMAS."

The eyes of the husband and wife met silently. She was the first to speak.

"Do they know?"

Chester shook his head.

"You 'll tell them, of course?"

"I have n't made up my mind."

The baby was jabbering loudly on the bed — he was very noisy; it was not easy for her to hear what was said.

"I'm sure you ought to tell them!" she cried passionately.

"Perhaps so. But I'd like to think it over."

A subtle terror slid over her face. "What can they do to you? I don't know about such things. Is there any — law?"

"Laws enough — laws in plenty. But I'm not answerable for the crimes of my chauffeur. It's only a question of damages."

The wife of the rich man drew a long breath. "Oh, if it's nothing but *money!*"

"Not that it would make any difference if they *could* touch me," he continued, with a proud motion of his tired head. "It's purely a question of feeling — it's a question of right within a right, Mary. It's to do what is *really* kind by these people — Why, Mary, if you could have seen it! From beginning to end it was the most beautiful, the most wonderful thing. Nothing of the kind ever happened to me before. Mary, if an angel from the throne of God had done it — they could n't have felt — they could n't have treated me — it was enough to make a fellow a better man the rest of his days. Why, it was worth *living* for, I tell you! . . . And now to let them know . . ."

Hurlburt Chester was very tired, as we say. He choked, and hid his pale face in his pillow. And his wife laid hers beside it and cried — as women do — without pretending that she did n't. But the baby laughed aloud. And then there drove through the father's mind the repeated phrase which followed the race of the "Roarer" all the way from Beverly to Annisquam: —

"What if it were Bert?"

Chester's head whirled yet from the fatigue and jar of the trip, and the words seemed to take leaps through his brain as the car leaped when she was at the top of her great speed. So he kissed the child, and dashed a drop from his cheek quite openly — since only Mary saw.

A constraint unusual to their candid relations breathed like a fog between the husband and the wife; indeed, it did not lift altogether as the autumn opened and closed.

Chester's visits to Annisquam (in which she once or twice accompanied him) were many and merciful; and the distinguished surgeon took the responsibility of the case till the boy was quite convalescent. The lad recovered slowly, but St. Clair promised that the cure would be complete.

The touching gratitude of Jacob Dryver amounted to an idealization such as the comfortable, undramatic

life of Chester had never experienced. He seemed to swim in it as an imaginative person dreams of swimming in the air, tree-high above the heads of the crowd on the earth. The situation had become to him a fine intoxicant, — but it had its reactions, as intoxicants must.

September and October burned to ashes upon the North Shore. Fire of maple, flash of sumac, torch of elder, flare of ivy, faded into brown November, and the breakers off the Beverly coast took on the greens and blues of north-wind weather below the line of silver surf.

The Chesters closed "their own hired house" and moved to town. The Aurora remained in her stable, nor had she left it since the morning when she came wearily back from Annisquam.

His wife had noticed, but had not seemed to notice, that Chester rode no more that fall. She noted too, but did not seem to note, that he continued his visits to the injured lad after they had returned to the city.

On all the great holidays he made a point of going down — Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New-Year's day. Mrs. Chester had wished to duplicate for the quarryman's boy the Christmas gifts of her own child (such had been her pretty fancy), but Batty was quite a lad — ten years old; and Bert, like a spoiled collie, was yet a baby, and likely to remain so for some time to come. So the mother contented herself, perforce,

with less intimate remembrances. Once, when she had packed a box of miracles — toys and books, clothes and candy — she thrust it from her with a cry: "They would never touch these — if they knew! Hurlburt! Hurlburt! don't you think they ought to know?"

"Do what you think best, Mary," he said wearily. "I have never been able to decide that question. But you are free to do so if you prefer."

He regarded her with an expression that went to her heart. She flung herself into his arms and tried to kiss it away.

Now Mary Chester, as we have said, was a worrier, and the worrier never lets a subject go. As the winter set in, her mind closed about the matter which had troubled her, and it began to become unbearable, like a foreign substance in the flesh.

On a January afternoon — it was one of those dark days when the souls of people cloud over — she flung on her furs, and leaving a penciled line to her husband saying what she had done, she took the train to Gloucester and a dreary electric car to Annisquam.

The flowers in the front yard were knee-deep in snow; but Batty sat in the window busy with a Sorrento woodsaw of her providing. He laughed outright when he saw her, and his mother flung open the door as if she had flung open her heart.

"Land!" she cried. "In all this snow!"

She finished tying a fresh white apron over her polka-dotted blue wrapper, and joyously led the lady in.

Batty was a freckled little fellow, with red hair like his father's; he had the pretty imperiousness of a sick and only child who has by all the sorceries contrived to escape petulance. When he had greeted the visitor, he ran back to his jig-saw. He was carving camwood, which stained his fingers crimson.

"I want to see you — alone," began Mrs. Chester, nervously. It had been one of Chester's pleasures to warm the entire house for the convalescent lad, and big coal fires were purring in Batty's bedroom and in the ten-foot "parlor," whither his mother conducted her guest. The doors were left open. The scent of the camwood came across, pungent and sickening. The fret of the jig-saw went on steadily.

"He 's makin' a paper-cutter — for Mr. Chester," observed Batty's mother. "He made a watch-case last week — for Mr. Chester."

Mary Chester paled, and she plunged at once: —

"There's something I've come to tell—I've *got* to tell you. I can't keep it to ourselves any longer. I have come to tell you how it happened — that Batty — We thought you 'd rather not know —"

"Lord! my dear," said the quarryman's wife, "we 've known it all the while."

The visitor's head swam. She laid it down upon

her gloved hands on Mrs. Dryver's centre-table. This had a marble top, and felt as the quarries look in winter on Cape Ann. What were tears that they should warm it? The sound of the jig-saw grew uneven and stopped.

"Hush!" said the boy's mother. "*Batty* don't know; he 's the only one that don't."

She tiptoed and shut the door.

"You never see Peter Trawl, did you? He 's a neighbor — cross-eyed — sells lobsters — well, it was him picked Batty up to the Willows that day. So he seen the number runnin' away, an' so he told. We 've known it from fust to last, my dear."

"And never spoke!" said Mary Chester. "And never spoke!"

"What 's the use of jabberin'?" asked Batty's mother. "We thought Mr. Chester 'd feel so bad," she added. "We thought he did n't know."

The worrier began to laugh, then cry; first this, then that; for her nerves gave way beneath her. She sat humbly in her rich furs before the quarryman's wife. She felt that these plain people had outdone her in nobility, as they had rivaled her in delicacy, — her, and Hurlburt, too.

"Oh, come and see my baby!" she cried. It was the only thing that occurred to her to say.

Now at that moment Batty gave a little yelp of ecstasy, threw down his jig-saw, and got to the front

door. His father was there, stamping off the snow; and the lad's idol, his ideal, his man angel, stood upon the threshold, — nervous, for an angel, and with an anxious look.

But when the two men saw the women crying together upon the quarry-cold centre-table, they clasped hands, and said nothing at all.

"Has the carrier come?"

"Yes."

"And gone?"

"Some time ago."

"No letters?"

"Only a few bills, or receipts. I put them on his desk."

"Nothing for me? You are sure?"

"Quite sure."

The figure on the bed turned its face to the wall. The figure in the cap and apron dropped upon the patient a glance more professional than personal — one of the sort which drives the sick to a mutiny none the less pronounced because helpless and hopeless.

There were moments when Mrs. Glessner could cheerfully have flung boiling hot water bags at Miss Peck, not without the spectral wish that the rubber might burst. There were others when she regarded the nurse with a grateful glow that could almost be called affectionate, and checked herself in the act of conversation verging on the confidential. She vibrated between the emotional extremes of a monotonous but well cared for invalid life.

Now the face upon the pillow — it was an attractive face, not marred by any of the corrosive disorders — flung itself over suddenly, and a pair of delicately rounded arms rose out of lace elbow-sleeves and shot straight into the air with a gesture which Miss Peck knew well.

"Is the door open?"

"Yes."

"Is the hall door open?"

"Yes."

"Are *all* the doors open so we could hear the telephone?"

"Every one."

"So *I* could hear it?"

"I don't see how you could help it."

"You are sure there has not been any message?"

"Perfectly sure."

"Would you mind going down and asking the Central if we have missed any call?"

"I will go as soon as I have attended to a few things."

"Would you mind going now?"

"I suppose not. — No, I will go."

. . . "There was n't any message, was there?"

"Not any."

"Do you think it 's too late for any, to-night?"

"He never calls up after ten o'clock. He don't want to spoil your night."

"He is very thoughtful of me," said Mrs. Glessner.

The nurse made no reply.

The patient watched her with a furtive interest. Miss Peck was a small person. She had a profile like a squirrel's; her mouth was kind and weak; her eyes were bright and experienced. She had the shrill American voice; it filed the ear and brain. Miss Peck's had become the chief society of a naturally vivacious but sensitive, now too sensitive, woman. The fatal human repugnance to solitude fed, however sparingly, upon the nurse. The invalid had gone so far as to wish that she could love Miss Peck.

Melicent Glessner had not yielded easily to her fate. In fighting phrase, she had "died hard." Even yet she was not bedridden; not perhaps so much from force of heroism as from personal fastidiousness. She was a vigorous hater (good lovers are apt to be), and had battled with her doom all the way down, abhorring the evidences of descent in the curving lines of strength. She loved health, youth, beauty, admiration, tenderness, love; she had known them all. She liked action, eagerness, social attrition, the incidents of the hour; the natural human impulses were strong in her; she craved the wine of joy, and used to think that she was born to drink it. There was not a hypochondriac nerve in her; she had rung to the tuning-fork of hope as long as any string of her responded to the key. She was not particularly patient, and did her

share of complaining as any hearty, undisciplined creature will; but she was not ill-natured, nor sour in the flavor. She was not what we call a religious woman, although she had been taught, when she was a child, to respect a type of faith which in maturity she had not cultivated. In a word, she was no saint; only a woman — a very woman — smitten by the sword of suffering which lays the soul and body low. She had been stabbed through and through, but she had not perished. For years she had cherished a pugnacious instinct of recovery. When the knowledge of the facts was made known to her, by one of the physicians who will not tell professional lies, she had fought fiercely with the truth, and then accepted it as she had defied it — altogether. At first she used to speak of it to her husband; it was not easy not to share such a great thing with some human creature who loved her; but she had long since given that up. It was her first lesson in the grammer of self-conquest, of which the well know so little and the sick must learn so much.

"I see it now. It was a kind of rudeness," she said aloud to the only consciousness that she could address upon so intimate a topic. This, plainly, was not Miss Peck's. Then what? Had the atmosphere intelligence? The rose tint on the four walls of her silent room — had it sentience? Did the stars hear, on winter nights when the shade was lifted for them

to look coldly through? Had the frosty moon a soul? Did the brutal wind experience sympathy? Could the picture of one's dead mother smiling underneath the Leonardo's Christ above the mirror answer when one cried out? By degrees, very quietly but very plainly, it had become apparent to the denied woman that *something* answered, — not always, not explicitly, but sometimes, and in some way. She had begun to be aware of a soft encroachment upon the reserve of her loneliness; a movement of spirit towards her own. She did not go so far as to call it an interchange of intelligence; she was chiefly conscious of it as a delicate blender of feeling blurring the outlines of her solitude.

This, in Harris Glessner's necessary and altogether pardonable absences from her, was mainly unrelieved. When he was at home he was attentive to his wife, whom he had rapturously loved, and whom he still cherished when he could. When he was serving his country at the capital his opportunities to make poor Mele's lot easier to bear were, of course, limited by his civic obligations. He had accepted his nomination reluctantly; she had urged him, and her physician had permitted him to do so. Mele was young, and might live for twenty years. Glessner purposed to return to his law practice in a year or so. Meantime she could make a home with him in Washington for the winter. But she shook her head.

"We tried that last year. How long did I stay? Six weeks? I can't undergo another earthquake just now. I'm not quite so well able." This was so obviously true that the matter had dropped.

"Try it," she had said, — "try it for one session. If I find that I take it hard — if I grow worse —"

"If you grow worse, you sha'n't have to take it at all," he vowed eagerly. He ran home as often as he could; usually every week. He wrote. He telephoned. Between committees he thought of her a good deal. But she — she thought of him all the time and in all the ways that a deprived and lonely and idle woman can think of a well and overworked man.

That, in a sense, was the worst of it — her terrible power of concentration upon the man whom she had happened to love and marry. This, if a fault, was a wholly feminine one, belonging to the class of wifely traits which might be supposed to appeal to a man, but seldom do. At the beginning of her illness she had followed her temperament and had encroached upon his with the *naïveté* of one who is inexperienced in suffering. She had exacted and exhausted; she had claimed and accepted. She had fed upon his sympathy and had assumed his presence; she took his devotion— for he had given her no inconsiderable amount of it—as a matter of course, and it was a long time before it occurred to her that a too dependent sick woman may bring a man more discipline than happiness.

Melicent possessed one quality which, when the eternal two enter the caves of disillusion, is more valuable than beauty, charm, or intellect: she had good sense. This enabled her, after a time, to readjust the attitude of her expectations. Her life was like her electric fan — whirring feverishly, now at a lower, now at a higher pace, but always fixed to its base; never getting anywhere; always hearing its own outcries, by which it worried or wearied the listener. Sometimes, on a hot August night when the current was turned on at the power house afresh, at one o'clock in the morning, it would seem to her as if her soul must rush out on the gusts of the artificial wind and wander through space, a disconnected, freed, but unappeased identity, clamoring for what it could not have, obedient as machinery, but perhaps — who knew? — as rebellious at the secret of its being. She felt a curious kinship with the helpless thing.

Now it was February, and the heavy fan stood silent upon its firm shelf on the other side of the bed. Melicent glanced at it compassionately.

"You cannot even complain," she thought.

She had experienced several years of captivity before it came to her knowledge that escape from her fate was possible. At first all her thoughts swung towards life. She expected — in fact, she commanded — recovery; she pushed her way towards all the remedial doors, and when she found one locked, clamored

at another. Her mind dwelt upon health, on healing, on salvation. Afterwards, as the long disabled do, she rebounded, and hated that which she had so passionately and vainly sought. She weighed her lot and flung it from her with a healthy contempt which no well person is sound enough to understand.

She began to believe that she wished to die. She was quite sincere in this conviction, and when she learned at last that her preference might be gratified at any unknown time she was surprised to find that the news gave her so little pleasure. That it should be in the nature of her malady to bring the clockwork of life to a sharp stop without warning seemed, somehow, bad manners. A sheriff or an executioner had more courtesy. Death, it appeared, felt under no obligations to show any. One might live ten years, or as many minutes; five years, or five seconds. What of it? Now that her heart's desire had become practicable, what was there so tragic in the fact? She was perplexed to find that her instinct leaped against her conviction in the direction of life. Life! Mere life — plain, commonplace life — that which it had been so easy to condemn and habitual to hate! Life — hard life, denied, disabled, forbidden of hope, and captive to that dejection which only the long afflicted can distinguish from despair — cruel life — torn by the beasts of suffering, refused the angels of healing — just life!

She stood astonished before the windows of revelation. The natural vigor of her soul arose and opened them. After all, in face of everything, did she crave the despised and rejected thing that she had trampled? Did she *want* to live?

She had never been what we call a morbid person, and it was a curious fact that her chief danger of becoming such arrived by the way of her healthiest impulse. In the very splendid sanity of her revolt against death she began to experience such a fear of it as she had never known or imagined.

It was not so much to the incident of dying that she objected — this had for a long time presented itself to her rather as a circumstance than an event — but to the prospective abruptness of the circumstance. She had dreamed of death as a friend, or even a lover. Now she was face to face with a highwayman or assassin. Had she coughed or ached her life away, decently and in order, by a conventional process, she was sure that she should have welcomed a release which now began to assume all the hues and contours of alarm.

Melicent was by nature sincere, and she acknowledged to herself that the ambush of death occupied the foreground of her thoughts, but no method of avoiding the fact occurred to her.

None at least occurred to her by any philosophy of life that she had known — or Harris Glessner,

either, for that matter. They had both been people of the world — the live, visible world, throbbing with pleasures and ambitions, silken with luxuries, clamorous of joy, vocal with self, the well world (until she had been smitten), and this is to say the supreme word of it. They had been the children of good fortune, pampered and arrogant of personal and mutual happiness.

Now it seemed there were other worlds. Pain, denial, desolation, despair — these strange planets, which had appeared upon her unprepared astronomy in their order, preceded the gentle movement into its appointed place of that other which is called the world of the unseen. Persons who lack certain of the finer forms of development do not use the adjectives defining them; and she, who had no religious life, did not use its terms. She did not say to herself that the star which was slowly revolving into the map of her sad skies was the world of spiritual things. She did not call it so, because she did not know enough to name it. Rather she felt it to be so before she knew it. For a time she rested mistily in her feeling, as creation rests in nebulosity before form occurs. When does it occur? Did chaos recognize the moment when construction stood apparent? Who, though he watch the night out, can capture the instant of dawn? Who sees when the breathing, blushing torch of perfume and of color ceases to be a bud and is a rose?

There came at last an hour when Melicent perceived that her rose was afire, her dawn abloom, her chaotic world an ordered cosmos, swinging out of haunted darkness into solemn light.

It was a snowy night, and the wind was wild. The knuckles of the storm knocked upon the windows eagerly, as if an organism without called upon that within. Melicent had been less strong than usual, and breathed with difficulty. She had been thinking all day about her husband — God knew why — uneasily. All her thoughts and feeling returned upon herself, baffled and beaten, like homing pigeons that could not be induced to fly unless they were carried to a distance by force.

It was never possible afterwards for her to explain the manner of her soul when it became suddenly but very quietly apparent to her that it communicated with Soul beyond itself. Out of the storm, cleaving the dark, the wings of intelligence, emotion, power, replied to her; and she perceived for the first time in her own consciousness that there was such a fact as human prayer.

She struggled against her pillows and sat erect, stretching out her beautiful arms.

"God!" she cried. "Great God!"

She sank back, panting. Her ignorance of the world of spirit — its supernal heights, its sacred depths — overwhelmed her with a sudden shame.

"I do not know the language," she said. "I am an uneducated person."

She got up and groped to the window, trying to fling it wide; but the sleet had frozen, and she could not stir the sash. She dropped upon the cushioned seat below and laid her face upon the sill. The room seemed as small as asphyxiation. Only the night, the storm, the skies, immensity, were large enough to hold the mighty impulse which enveloped her.

"Thou, Unseen!" she said aloud, "I am a prisoner of the body. I cannot break my bars. My fetters are sore upon me. I suffer more than anybody knows — it is making a coward of me. I bear it very badly. I am not brave. I am worn out. I hate my life — oh, I loathe my life — and yet I have this inconsistency — I cannot understand it in myself — I am afraid to die. Is that not contemptible? Nobody understands it — no well person — how could they? No, nor any of the people who die slowly — in their beds, persons they love holding their hands, because you know when it will be. But not to know — never to know — any minute — and every little thing that happens lessening the chances — and not to be a religious person, either. I used to have such a happy life. I was well, and the world was gay, like tulips in the grass. I went to dinners, I loved my husband, I enjoyed myself. I did not expect to be like this — not to suffer this way — not to be crushed out as you 'd step on a

crawling creature — just the motion of some awful Foot —"

She sank from the cushion to the floor and reached for her bell, but withdrew her shaking hand.

"I won't," she thought. "I will *not* have Sarah Peck around — not just now — not if I do die!"

Her emotion and her will dueled together, and for the first time the agitation which had almost overpowered her went down before the stronger force. She lay where she was till she could crawl; and then, crawling, reached her bed. That first acute, coherent prayer went nigh to being her last.

"It is plain," she said, "I cannot even pray like other people — One must have more strength — and then I do not say things in the proper way."

With her indomitable good sense she added, —

"A person cannot be expected to kill herself praying."

Now, while she lay there, smiling whimsically, for she had the saving quality of humor when suffering gave it half a chance, there came to her something which she had not recalled for who knew how long? It took the form of a sensation, as the acutest memory often will, and she leaned against a substance soft and warm. She perceived suddenly that it was her mother's knee. Above her a still face brooded and melted; it had the unfathomable tenderness that only mothers' faces are deep enough to know. She was a little girl,

and she said her prayers as she had been taught, before she went to bed.

"Now I lay me down to sleep."

Melicent smiled. Too weak for emotion,— even for the sacred emotion that may save one's soul alive, — forced to the parsimonious economy of feeling by which the sick are bound, she turned upon her tumbled pillow and her lips moved.

"Won't this do?" they said.

"Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep."

Miss Peck came running up.

"He is at the wire," she cried. "He called for you. He said not to disturb you, unless — Good Lord! I should say so! Put your two feet back upon that bed! — No. Not a livin' step, on my diploma! Here. I 'll open the window for you. Can you hold on a minute till I ring him off?"

The nurse bent to the broken whispers that struggled from the pillow. "My dear love to him — and I have something to say to him — I will write. Miss Peck? Miss Peck! Be sure and *thank* Mr. Glessner for taking the trouble to call me up to-night. If I had been a little stronger — "

But Miss Peck, at the long-distance wire, was wrestling with the powers and principalities of the storm.

"It cut us off," she said discontentedly, when she hurried back.

Drama, like the kingdom of heaven, is within, not without.

It is the human spirit rather than the human incident that stands for energy and the thrill of life. It would not be easy to explain to the lover of a cheap stage or of a decadent novel the intensity of thought and feeling which now accelerated the existence of this invalid woman. She came into the spiritual inheritance with a quiet excitement which the passing of many days did not wear down. Your enthusiasm or mine may rush like a toreador into the arena of a startling world. Hers fed upon the reality and the history of a prayer.

She wrote her husband when she had thought it well over, and tried to explain to him something of the novelty of that which had befallen her. She was surprised that she found this so hard to do, chiefly for lack of a common vocabulary; for she perceived from her own experience that he would not readily know what she was talking about. She did not see her way to make the subject interesting to him, and Melicent was not stupid. She never wrote him a dull letter. Now she observed that she must use a foreign tongue to her politician. Nevertheless, she wrote. He had planned to come home for a Sunday, but the bill

before the Ways and Means, then occupying the attention of the country, needed him. He was detained, and regretfully telephoned to say so. She had not seen him for nearly three weeks; this was the longest separation of their lives. Glessner had not yet allowed his career to remove his wife from the foreground to the perspective of life.

Meanwhile she continued to pray as she continued to breathe. That outgoing of the spirit to the "not herself" which existed beyond her personal lot had become to her a strange necessity, like a narcotic to the sleepless; yet she exercised her newly discovered energy with a restraint which would have commanded the respect of the coldest scoffer. Since that first rapturous break into the world of spiritual power she had never wasted her strength in superfluous emotion.

Each night she quietly gathered up the burden of the day into the words her mother taught her, and she made no effort to think or feel beyond them. When she laid her down to sleep she prayed the Lord her soul to keep, and that was the end of the matter. It could not be said that her fear of death was extinguished, but that it was superseded by something which she felt more keenly: the conscious effort to remove it by a newly attained faculty. Miss Peck's experienced eyes observed her patient with a studious perplexity. Sarah Peck perceived that she had to deal

with something which was not taught in the hospitals. She wondered if the omission were in the surgical line.

"Has the carrier come?"

"Yes."

"And gone?"

"Oh, yes."

"No letter to-day?"

"You had one yesterday."

"I know. I had reasons — something especial. Is the door open?"

"Oh, yes."

"All the doors open between me and the telephone?"

"Just as usual; every one."

"You are sure there has n't been any call?"

"Oh, yes — sure. It ain't forty-eight hours since you had one. I never knew a man telephone his wife so much. It must cost a sight — all these long-distance tolls. — Ain't feeling quite so well, are you?"

"I don't know," replied Mrs. Glessner. "I had not thought — perhaps not. One has something else to think of than how one feels. — Would you go and ask the Central — no, never mind. Miss Peck? I don't want to hurt your feelings. But I think I should like to be alone for a little while."

"Here 's your bell," said Sarah Peck, averting the profile of a grieved squirrel. She went away, but

remained within hearing of her patient, on the couch in the hall.

Melicent lay still and looked about her room, as if the familiar details of it might reduce the force of some emotion whose current startled her. The pearl-white roses on her table were fresh (Harris had ordered them to come every other day); the velvet below them, beneath a mist of Mexican embroidery blurred into the rose tint of the walls; her magazines, with leaves uncut, disregarded her; her mother's Bible which Miss Peck had hunted up for her lay on the foot of the lace-draped bed; her mother's picture, with the Leonardo's Christ above it, had the manner of observing her. The large brass fan on its shelf stood stolidly but resentful, as if it would have crashed something to atoms if it could move; or perhaps it would have spun disdainfully and whirled into space, whence electric fires spring, and where they cannot be imprisoned to the whims of man.

The night was as sultry as it was still; a warm fog was crawling from some unexplained, one was almost tempted to say some inexperienced point of the compass, and the lungs of the air were paralyzed.

Mrs. Glessner panted upon the bed, but she had the unconsciousness of her personal discomfort which mental exaltation may give to physical suffering. She was drawn into the upper ether of a strange and mighty moment through which she seemed to herself

to be swept like an indirigible air-ship, moving at the will of winds upon whose nature or force she could not count.

With motionless body, with closed eyes, she stirred and saw. A half a thousand miles away from her dim room, from her gray life, from Sarah Peck and the electric fan, she moved about the throbbing city where she had not set her foot for now six years. Those few poignant weeks of last winter scarcely counted, except as one of the nightmares in the dream of her troubled life.

Then, borne from her private car, by way of the easiest automobile in Washington, to her rooms, she had remained there until the experiment, disastrous for the invalid, and hardly less so for the husband, ended in a demonstrated failure. Without a protest from any source, she had been taken back to her New England country home. She had not left it since.

Now, as she crossed the smooth pavement of the brilliant streets, curious old Bible words occurred to her: "I sought him whom my soul loveth . . . but I found him not . . . I said, 'I will rise now . . . and seek him.'" She experienced no difficulty in finding his apartment, to which she was drawn by hidden currents as unseen but as effective as the wires which interlaced and lighted the house. Should love be less ingenious than electricity? She asked herself the

question for the first time, smiling as she did so at the conceit.

His doors opened to her without ring or knock, and she crossed the vestibule to his parlor. There was a portière, of the sort common to hotel suites, a heavy, vulgar thing; it was of a dark color, maroon or Indian red. She stood half behind it, clinging to its plush folds, and — now for the first time conscious of fear lest she should be discovered, but made quickly aware that she was not — she gazed into the room.

Three men sat at a walnut centre-table. The table was littered with papers and cigar ashes. The room was purple with smoke. Out of its spiral coils the figures and faces of the men evolved. One presented an indifferent appearance — she could not have told herself anything about him except that his hair had once been red. The other was a heavy man with a furtive eye; his face was broad and blunt; his hands were more intelligent than the rest of his physique, and one of them played with a pencil. With the other he snapped the corners of envelopes sedulously, as if he were setting a paper trap. The third man was Harris Glessner. He was the only one of the three who was not smoking; he seemed to have laid aside his cigar to think better without it.

Melicent made an instinctive movement to go in and speak to her husband; she longed to put a hand upon his shoulder, an arm about his neck, but found

that this was impossible; advance she could not, for whatever reason; but stood swaying, checked and forbidden, clinging to the portière. She knew little of politics (she had sometimes asked him to explain that mystery, but Harris had replied that he did not like to talk shop with her), and she knew less of law; but she made out soon enough to understand that which smote her sick and still. He who sat making paper traps was proposing to Harris a monstrous thing: he was offering her husband — *her* husband — an opportunity of the questionable sort that approaches a man in a man's world; it had to do, she perceived, with his vote, or with his influence, with one of the sacred charges which the people confide to the brains and principles that they choose to represent them.

She was shocked to perceive that her husband did not receive the proposition as the insult that it was. Inscrutably silent, he sat with level eyes that scarcely saw the man who played with the envelopes. Glessner's cigar gleamed between his fingers; the strong lines about his mouth seemed to weaken as she watched; he was sunken in a pit of speculation or indecision.

The man who was talking snatched up a fresh envelope and twisted it into a curious form like that of the old-fashioned fly-traps which our mothers used to make, and suddenly tossed it aside. The envelope

THE THIRD MAN WAS HARRIS GLESSNER

unfolded slowly from its unnatural shape, and revealed itself to the wife's eyes quite plainly; it was one that had been addressed in her husband's handwriting — and it was addressed to herself. As it was slipping over into the waste-basket, Harris put out his clean, white hand and reclaimed it; he put it in his pocket — gently, she thought; but still he did not speak. His silence distressed her; it seemed to her to imply a moral vacillation of which in her clinical world she had never dreamed that he could be capable, and she cried out: —

"Harris! Harris! *Dear* Harris!" three times to him, piteously.

The cry caught her back again to her own room, to her own bed. There she lay, agitated beyond any agitation that she had ever known. Her quivering lips stirred. Self went out of her like a burden thrown a thousand miles down to lighten and quicken flight. She could no more have asked any personal comfort of the Almighty Heart than she could have sprung into a life-boat and left Harris on deck of a drowning ship. All her being leaped to the side of his, and stood as if it would protect him, or perish with him.

But Melicent was now very tired and weak; she found it impossible to exercise her newly discovered spiritual faculties; these evaded her, as the spiritual will, from sheer physical inadequacy; she could not pray; she could not pray for her husband in any man-

ner adjusted to the emergency in which, whether rightly or wrongly, she felt him to be. No words worthy of his need or her distress subjected themselves to her will. In utter weariness and discouragement she crept into those her mother taught her, as she had crept upon her mother's lap. Something other than her will wrought upon the prayer of her childhood this significant and beautiful revision: —

> "Now I lay me down to sleep,
> I pray the Lord *his* soul to keep."

She slept little and brokenly, but towards morning floated into uneasy rest. The winter dawn was later than usual, for the fog was still solid, and rose like a wall between the windows and the world. Melicent's consciousness began where it left off in the night, and she found herself repeating words that grew from those with which she prayed herself asleep as rhyme grows to mating rhyme: —

> "Be near to bless him when I wake,
> I pray the Lord for his dear sake."

Her mind was quite clear and strong, and moved without delirium or delusion in the direction whence her heart propelled it. She thought of her husband — she thought of him without respite, — but all her vigor was now in her mind and heart. Her body had become suddenly and unaccountably weak. This fact she did not notice; or if she did, she gave no sign.

She never permitted herself to be what is called "sick abed," but lay upon the outside of it, beneath her rose-pink puff. Miss Peck observed her, not without anxiety.

"I sent for the doctor," she said. "Just our luck — he 's gone off; out of town somewhere. You 'll have to let me call one of the others."

But Mrs. Glessner shook her head. She was paying the least possible attention to anything the nurse was saying, and this Miss Peck perceived.

"'T ain't a good day," she suggested consolingly. "You might as well be a mouse in a glass bell. There ain't any air *to* breathe. There! I believe I 'll turn your fan on."

The patient did not answer, and Miss Peck switched the fan first to its gentlest, then to its fiercest speed. The room was gray, although the shades were flung to the top; the fog pressed up against the windows like the depths of a motionless sea which had arisen silently in the night and engulfed the house. The two women looked into it and up through it like divers from some unfathomable submarine depth. Miss Peck went to the window, and returned uneasily to the bed. The hand which crept to the patient's pulse was pushed away, not without some vigor.

"I don't want to be bothered about my pulse," said Mrs. Glessner; "I have things to think of." She lay staring steadily into the fog.

The fan was whirling wildly, fixed to its base, unable to escape. Melicent felt as if it were trying to whirl off into space, and that it would drag her with it if it could. The sound of it was half articulate, wholly uncanny, and filled the world.

Miss Peck stepped softly out into the hall, but a voice from the bed detained her.

"Miss Peck, you will not telephone — not yet. Wait awhile. I am not as sick as you think. I don't wish Mr. Glessner disturbed — not yet."

"Very well," said Miss Peck, soothingly. "I s'pose you 'll let me go down and heat your beef tea, won't you. There 's no objection to *that*, is there? I am going, anyhow."

She slid downstairs and went to the telephone as straight as she could go. She had taken the precaution to shut the doors.

Sarah Peck sat at the telephone with an inspired obstinacy upon her face. The squirrel in her profile seemed to come out and crack a hard nut. She was an experienced telephoner, and the wire carried her piercing American voice very distinctly through the windless, resonant fog. "There!" she said, when, after the necessary delay of the long-distance message, she hung up the receiver, "I 'm not going to be ordered around by any patient. She ain't fit to judge, God help her. — I don't s'pose God has much to do with it," she added, with the natural materialism of her

profession. "It 's husbands are the Almighty, most cases, as far as I can see."

Sarah Peck came back with her beef tea.

"You 've been telephoning," said Mrs. Glessner. "I know it as well as if I had heard you."

"Well, yes," replied Sarah Peck, "I did. I telephoned to my gentleman friend. I had something important to say to him, and I thought you would n't mind."

"I did n't know you *had* a gentleman friend," observed the patient, with a spark of feminine wickedness. "He never came here to see you, did he?"

"I don't allow him to come when I am on cases," returned Miss Peck, primly.

The fog, as it thickened, changed its nature, as fogs do; the wall had toppled into the ocean; the sea crinkled into a sponge — a huge, unwieldy, pitiless sponge, held at the face and pressed down hard. Melicent found herself putting out her hands and trying to push it away. As the day crawled on, and Mrs. Glessner's condition did not improve, Miss Peck took this nut, too, into her own teeth and cracked it. She sent for the foreign doctor, who left drugs which the patient refused, and went away. After his visit, Miss Peck applied herself to the long-distance wire again, but failed to connect her number with that of anybody's gentleman friend, and returned to her post upstairs. The patient slept, or seemed to

sleep, and the rage of the electric fan filled the room.

Now, in truth, Melicent was not sleeping; she was feeling; she might have said that she was praying, except that, as we have noticed, she was still unused to the terminology, and the religious phrase did not readily occur to her. All day her emotion outran her strength, but all day it ran the old, beautiful, self-effacing road of a wife's love. She seemed to have lost the occult power, or the telepathic gift — call it what you will — of the previous evening, and no longer with mind or eye could she follow the image of her husband. Nothing was left her; by no way could she project herself towards him, except in the simple words which had got possession of her. She rang the changes upon them in the fluctuations of her strength. Whether she had enough of it left to take her through the day or the night was a matter which had ceased to occupy her thoughts. She did not concern herself whether she should live or die; she concerned herself with him.

> "I pray the Lord for his dear sake —
> For his dear sake —
> I pray the Lord his soul to keep."

It might be said that her being had now no articulation beyond these gentle outcries. As the night drew on, Miss Peck noticed that her lips moved, and stooped to catch some wish or sign of suffering from

her. The nurse was embarrassed to find that the patient was praying. The staff had not taught the training-school what to do for such a symptom. Sarah Peck wished that she could have recorded on her chart the fluctuations of a condition which made a patient look like that; but she missed them, obviously. She felt that this was the fault of the electric fan, which raved like thwarted love or an escaping soul about the room. All night the fan disturbed itself — now madly, now patiently — but all night it had the energy of a purpose, as if it would achieve God knew what, or perish He knew how. Melicent heard it plainly and it did not seem to trouble her. She felt herself whirling on with it, spinning into spaces unseen, acquiring powers unknown, growing one with the mysterious forces of nature, which went upon their awful errands, and returned when these were done. She felt as solitary as if she had been cast out into ether, the only thing that had no orbit, and so went seeking one with all its being. Now the fan itself seemed to have taken the words from her too weak lips, and to repeat them in the strange, half-querulous tones of the ever-living and all-demanding elements: —

> "I pray the Lord . . .
> I pray the Lord his soul to keep."

In the morning she was no better; perhaps, as she tried to assure Miss Peck, no worse. She experienced

unusual need of sleep, and drifted into it again, almost as soon as she awoke.

The day was vivid when she turned upon her pillow and fully found herself. For once she had not been able to get into her pretty gowns and play that she was not sick abed, but lay still beneath the rose puff in her white nightdress with its lace elbow sleeves, her long hair braided in two bright braids, and her sweet, gray profile set towards the window.

There was no fog. Walls and seas and smothering sponges had melted and were not. The sun was shining joyously. A dart of it had stabbed through the lace curtain and reached the wall above the mirror, where it seemed to pierce like a golden nail and support the pictures of her mother and the great Christ: these regarded her smiling, she thought.

It did not occur to her for a few moments that some one was holding her hand. Plainly it could not be Sarah Peck, and she had not thought of herself as sick enough for the doctor to do that. She turned and took a leisurely look, and across the lenses of her eyes there passed the image of her husband sitting still and pale beside the bed.

"I am having that strange experience again," she thought. "It is not Harris; it is the vision of Harris. It will pass — as the other passed. I will hold it as long as I can — *Dear* Harris!" she said aloud.

But then she perceived that it was not his vision;

it was not the wraith of his body, nor of her own, that met in that long, warm, silent hand-clasp, too intimate at first to be broken by any words. She saw that he was trying not to startle her, as he had been cautioned, so she spoke before he dared to, quite as if he had been there every day.

"Why, dear," she said, "good-morning!"

She was surprised to find that he could not answer. The emotion in his face did not arouse her own, because she was too weak to feel any. But it drew them together by quiet, invisible currents. He stooped, and their lips found each other. She did not feel able to lift herself from the pillow, but lay observing him gently: his strong head, sparsely dashed with gray, his experienced, kind, gray eyes alert and worldly, but luminous with the consciousness of her. The lines about his mouth were all strong now; it shut with a tender resolution.

She had half forgotten how massive his shoulders were. He had the firm attitudes of the successful man. One of his white, authoritative hands sank into the down of the rose-pink silk above her body as if to make sure that he had not lost her. The other held her own cold fingers. These were growing slowly warm within his vital grasp.

Miss Peck appeared in the doorway with warning eyes, and went away.

"Mele," said Glessner, "we must not talk—not yet."

"How long are you going to stay?" asked Melicent.

"Oh, any length of time. Until you get well."

"Is n't that rather a large proposition?"

"I don't care how large. — Why did n't you send for me before?"

"I did n't send for you at all. You see, I was so busy."

"Busy?"

"Busy thinking," she said dreamily. She reached for his free hand, and disengaging hers from the other, made him understand that he should place it on the pillow, so that she could turn her cheek upon it, and in that nest of love and warmth she rested with a divine content. He sat beside her, scarcely stirring.

As the day deepened, she strengthened. He perceived that whatever her burden was, it would now harm her less to share it than to wear it, and when he saw that she was determined to speak he did not gainsay her, but bent and listened; guardedly, she thought — not without the pickets in his handsome eyes.

Her gaze traversed his familiar lineaments; it was as if she sought a new road across the map of him. Suddenly her pathological existence seemed to her so small a matter beside his vigorous and powerful one that her courage fell, and what she had purposed to say failed her altogether; so she plunged into the last words she had meant to utter:—

"Harris, what did those two men want of you?"

Glessner stared upon her.

"Night before last — that foggy night. It was at your hotel. One of them had red hair. The other — I hate the other. They were trying to persuade you to do something. It was something you thought you ought not to do."

"Do you often have bad dreams of this sort, Mele?" asked Glessner, in the soothing tones of an alienist. But Mele disregarded him without the tolerance of a smile.

"Ought you to have done it?" she persisted.

The guards in the politican's eyes retreated; they were replaced by a species of superstitious discomfort.

"Probably not," he parleyed, "if one had red hair, and since you hate the other —" He tried to laugh it off, but still sat staring. Mele caught her feeble breath.

"Did you do it?" she demanded.

"If you could possibly explain yourself —" he urged. Then his manner veered abruptly, and he seemed to weigh and measure what she had been saying. She followed this change of posture as quickly as it occurred.

"He made fly-traps out of envelopes at your table," she suggested, in a matter of fact tone.

"She has been delirious," thought Glessner. But he did not say so. He only sat beside her, staring still.

"*Did* you do it?" she repeated.

"No, thank God!" said Glessner, in a ringing voice. "No — and I never will!"

"No," reiterated Mele, comfortably. "Of course you never will. You *could n't*, could you?"

"Oh, look here!" cried the Congressman, "I won't take what I don't deserve — not from you. How does a man know what he could or could n 't do? He is the equivalent of his temptation, or he is not. How is he to know whether he is, or is n't, till the thing gets a mathematical form? Suppose a fellow finds a weak spot in himself — a rotten one, if you say so — pretty late in life, when he had thought he was safe — like that! And then, just like that! too, he thinks — he thought — Mele, Mele! I thought of *you*."

"I know," nodded Mele. "The envelope was addressed to me. You took it away from him. It reminded you."

But Glessner did not seem to hear her; he hurried, trembling, along.

"Anyhow, I did n't, and here I am. And here you are — alive. I 'll never leave you again!"

"Oh, yes, you will," smiled Mele. "What would your constituents say?"

"Hang my constituents!"

"Poor things!" said Mele, mischievously. "They did n't mean any harm — when they elected you."

But he could not smile, and did not try.

"I 'll be good to you," he gulped.

"You always *have* been good to me!" protested

I'LL GET OUT OF IT AS SOON AS I CAN

Mele. "You are the kindest man I ever knew. And thoughtful — look at those roses!"

She pointed a frail finger at the pearl-white buds. He caught the finger to his lips, and then her hand, her wrist, her arm.

"I 'll get out of it as soon as I can. I 'll come back to law — and you."

"What will become of the country?" inquired Mele. "What will become of your career?"

"Hang my career!" exploded the politician.

"Dear," spoke Mele, ruefully, "I 've been such a drag on you, shut in here — always ailing — never able to do things for you like other men's wives. Not even to stay in Washington the way other women do, never to order your house, can't entertain your friends — just shriveling here with Sarah Peck — and an electric fan — to ask the Lord for your dear sake — "

"Mele," said the Congressman, in an undertone, "if women only knew! But they don't, the best of them. There is n't a well, superficial woman in the land who could have done the kind of thing for me you have, you brave girl! You patient, sensitive, thinking, *feeling* creature! . . . What has got into your letters lately? You never wrote any like them before. I won't pretend I understood them, but sentences from them got between me and the bill.

I was answering one that night when — but never mind that any more. Why, Mele, what is Washington? What is political society? A house of cards, Blaine called it. Suppose you could have been there, playing the old stupid game? Do you believe you could have — well, I don't, that's all. You haven't the least idea what *character* does for a fellow; then there 's the way of loving him. There 's an assorted lot of ways, and yours, Mele — *yours* . . . Oh, you shall get well!" he cried boyishly. "I will make you so happy you will have to get well. Mele, Mele, Mele!" he entreated her.

Mele lifted a shining, inscrutable smile. She put up her hand to his cheek.

A SACRAMENT

THE summer afternoon was long and vivid. It was not too warm, but had the happy temperature of an ideal day, not to be expected by the calendar of the most capricious and the most compelling, we may dare to say one of the most respected of climates. Your true New-Englander loves his Northeasterly and forgives his blizzard, adores his Junes and ignores his Augusts, pardons his March, and flaunts his October in the face of the world.

This was a July Sunday, and the quite comfortable audience in the village meeting-house, having prepared for the auto-da-fé suitable to the occasion, relaxed in their bony pews with the sense of physical relief which goes so far to create a promising spiritual condition.

Considered æsthetically, the church presented no illusions and few attractions; the white paint was blistering and peeling on its wooden anatomy; the light and heat beat through its unstained windows; it occupied a gravelly hill-top, in winter as bleak as the theology which the people had outgrown without knowing it, in summer as hot as the doctrine of eternal retribution to which the senior deacon and

the heresy-hunter of the parish still adhered. The building, which had borne the suns and snows of a hundred bitter years, wore an expression of patient endurance creditable to the religion that it represented, and yet, somehow, touched by the spirit of the age at which it had arrived. The long, lean spire rising solitary against the hard sky had the aspect of enforced rather than voluntary loneliness; it seemed to cast reproachful glances at the well-occupied graveyard behind the horse-sheds, — as those of a church which would have said to its departed worshipers: —

"You can be buried and done with it. I was built of oak, and on honor, and I have to live and bear it all — your sins and your sorrows and your lack of sense, your gossip and scandal, and your theology; the way you treat your pastors and drive off your young men — but you can be buried and done with it. There 's no such luck for me."

This was on the outside, where, that afternoon, the young people of the parish loafed in the brambly graveyard or the shaded sheds, flirting or gossiping in undertones, not to be overheard by the "members" collected within. For inside the church it was four o'clock of a communion Sunday, and the elect of the faith were about to partake of the sacrament.

"There 's as many as sixty," suggested a clean-faced boy who sat on a gray slab, sarcophagus-shaped, with a gentle girl beside him; there was a

bodiless cherub on the sarcophagus, green with moss and grim with age; the boy traced the cherub with his fingers.

"I used to think it was an owl," he said, "when I was a little fellow."

But the girl smiled absently; she had a thoughtful look.

"Don't you ever want to go too?" She nodded toward the church.

"I 'll go anywhere you say," replied the boy. "You know I will."

"I like the way they look when they come out," said the girl. "It ain't the same 's when they go in."

"I like the way *you* look, all times," returned the eyes of the boy. But his lips did not say it; they were restrained by the higher feeling of the girl; his nature followed her religious sense as instinctively as his gaze followed her motions. Religion was a mystery, like love, and one was no more sacred than another to him. The boy and girl sat contentedly among the dead. Life was before them, and joy; both seemed to them eternal; the graves and the brambles retreated from their observation like the sombre details on the margin of an illuminated page whereon a passionate and happy lyric has been printed.

Inside the church it was cool and quiet. The light was now so late that it could not offend, and entered the long, unshaded western windows softly, as if it,

too, had been a worshiper. The summer air fluttered in and about like a flock of invisible birds; one had almost the sense of wings against the face. There was a scent of flowers growing outside — perhaps a syringa, overripe; some shrub that had been planted in a pitiful attempt to soften the barrenness of this denied and unattractive Zion.

For these were poor people, and could not afford beautiful things. The æsthetic sense is expensive, my cultivated friend; it is better to keep it under, unless it can be gratified. Perhaps it were better not to have any; there was now and then some one in the country parish who thought so, — for instance, the summer lady who had joined these plain people lately.

She pitied that parish so that she dared let nobody know how much; all the starvation of it, body and soul, its ugliness and ignorance, its penury and pettiness — yes, its pettiness most of all, because that was least the material of pity; so, too, its willfulness and hardness, its complacency and stupidity, all the blots that poverty and remoteness and ecclesiastical bigotry dash in the noble face of faith. Perhaps most of all she pitied the minister.

But she was not there that afternoon to pity anybody. Decorous Sabbatical glances aimed at her empty pew had already made known to the worshipers that Mrs. Hermione Alford was not among them. She was conspicuous to them always — by

her efforts to seem like them, as much as by her difference from them; by her knowledge of a world which they had never entered; by the ease of it, the dress of it, and the candid ingenuity of its manner; by the conscientious, perhaps too elaborate, determination to make herself useful or beloved, which overtakes a person who has begun rather late in life to consider the natures or needs of others. Everybody in church knew that Mrs. Alford was not there, before the Rev. Daniel True came out from the minister's room to open the service.

The audience was small,—those of communion Sundays always were, — but, by the standard of the parish, creditable to the faith, and, to the most inexperienced or skeptical eye, a group of people quite in earnest.

Prominent among these was the senior deacon; he had a submerged air, not expressive of his official importance; he had creaking feet, and good intentions; he sat humbly before the sacred table.

The pew of the heresy-hunter was opposite the senior deacon; neither appeared to observe the other that afternoon. The heresy-hunter had one of the faces which seem to have been omitted from the processes of evolution, a specimen left over from a prehistoric age; he had the eyes of a ferret and the mouth of a cod. The heresy-hunter observed keenly, but inferred weakly; his mentality was as chaotic as

his physiognomy, yet no more to be overlooked. He had influence, but was not popular. He had more followers than friends.

The widow of the last pastor sat in the pew immediately in front of Mrs. Alford's. The widow was critical of the present pastor. Her daughter, who worshiped beside her, was not. The minister's widow was very poor; perhaps the poorest member of a congregation familiar with the filings of a lifelong economy and the teeth of a biting penury.

The minister's widow wore a long crape veil, as rusty as an unblackened stove, and almost as thick. Her daughter had large eyes, blue and melancholy; they had the childlike look which some women never outgrow and others try in vain to acquire; they lifted once when the pastor's tall, slender height rose before the people; then dropped sadly.

The Rev. Daniel True stood beside the holy table. For such a scene, perhaps for any scene, he was something of a memorable figure. He had the dignity of early middle life, but none of its signs of advancing age. His hair was quite black, and curled on his temples boyishly; his mustache, not without a worldly cut, was as dark as his hair, and concealed a mouth so clean and fine that it was an ethical mistake to cover it. He had sturdy shoulders, although not quite straight; they had the scholar's stoop; his hands were thin, with long fingers; his gestures were

sparing and significant; his expression was so sincere that its evident devoutness commanded respect; so did his voice, which was authoritative enough to be a little priestly, and lacking somewhat in elocutionary finish, as the voices of ministers are apt to be, but genuine, musical, persuasive, at moments vibrant with oratorical power. He had a warm eye and a lovable smile. He was every inch a minister, but he was every nerve a man.

It was one of the parishes which do not keep their pastors, and Mr. True had already been there eight years. His people could not estimate him, but they were attracted to him. It was not in the higher mathematics that they should understand him, but some of them loved him, and most of them thought they did.

It was not said, but it was always felt, about the Reverend Mr. True that he was afraid of nobody. The senior deacon and the heresy-hunter did not control their pastor. That awful tribunal, the church committee, which has wrecked the lives and weakened the consciences of so many well-meaning clergymen, had no more terrors for this one than if he had been the editor of a popular magazine. He was as independent of parish politics as a sea-gull. The widow of his predecessor said this was because he was not married.

He stood for some moments silently before his

people that summer afternoon; he had an attentive and beautiful expression, as if he listened for some command from the invisible Power in which he believed. His white fingers reverently touched the bread; he broke it slowly; he did not raise his eyes.

The church had grown quite still. A butterfly had drifted in upon a sunbeam and hovered over the communion-table, swaying thence to the empty pulpit, where a vase of white roses stood; it was now so quiet that one almost fancied one could hear the butterfly,—the motion of its wings, the sound of its approach to the rose; it was like the conflict of a soul with moral conditions so delicate that all sense of peril is absent. The hands of the minister continued to stir upon the sacred bread.

"When He had broken," he said, "He blessed it. If there is any blessing above all others that we most sorely need, Lord make us fit to ask it."

It was scarcely possible to say where speech ended and prayer began, so gentle, so natural, were the minister's voice and manner; but when the people found their own souls at the feet of God they knew that his had led them there.

It was now so still that a woman's fan could be heard anywhere in the audience-room, and one of lace in the rear pew, finding itself audible, abruptly stopped and fell from a white-gloved hand to a white lap. The belated communicant, who had crept in

during the pastor's prayer, bowed her face upon the rail of the pew in front of her. Her little white French hat touched the widow's veil; this disturbed Mrs. Alford, and she moved slightly, making herself more comfortable with the pains of a worshiper who meant to retain her position. In fact, when the prayer came to an end, the summer lady did not raise her head.

"Lord," said the pastor, "we hunger. We starve for the love divine, and for human love, and sometimes the one famine confuses itself with the other famine, so that we know not where this ceases and where that begins. There is one hunger of the heart, and another of the soul. Feed Thou our highest which is our sorest hunger. If we starve, let us starve nobly, for Christ's sake."

As the voice of the pastor sank into these words a shrill sound pierced the silence of the village church. It was the whistle of the Sunday train, shrieking through the valley; it halted at the station, panting and protesting at the stop; for it was late. The air was so clear that one almost fancied one could hear the newspapers slapped off on the platform of the station, and the unwashed wheels of the Sunday cab which awaited chance passengers from a secular and unregenerate world.

The heresy-hunter cleared his throat as one who wished it to be recalled that he disapproved of Sunday papers. But most of the people were beyond atten-

tion to external trifles; each had gone the way of his own nature into a sincere and solemn hour.

Mrs. Hermione Alford did not stir. Her forehead, bent on the hard rail of the pew, received red marks like stigmata; she did not evade but wooed the sense of physical discomfort; this was a counter-irritant to misery with whose pangs she was out of patience, and out of courage. She had not meant to come to the service; she did not mean to share in its sacred symbols; she was where she was in spite of herself, and whether compelled by the noblest or the weakest in her, she could not have told.

The soft blur of her white hat, a little dark line of her hair, the curve of her delicate cheek, could be seen beyond the black barrier of the widow's veil. The minister had glanced, but did not look at the summer parishioner.

The senior deacon and the heresy-hunter distributed the sacred bread. Even the heresy-hunter felt that it had been blessed by a good man. The boots of the deacon, innocent of chalk or soapstone, creaked up and down the broad aisle. Two or three children who had wandered in from the sheds listened with awe and admiration to the deacon's boots; this nerve-rending sound was fixed in their minds and remained there for life, as the first condition to the initiation of the sacred ceremony.

The boy and girl had come from the sarcophagus

in the graveyard, and hesitating, quietly settled into an empty back pew. They sat thoughtfully. Now and then the boy looked at the girl so reverently that he seemed afraid to look at all; but she gazed at the table with its long white cloth and shining silver tankards.

Now the widow cried behind her veil as her old darned black glove carried the little square of bread to her lips; she exercised the enviable rights of chartered grief freely. But the blue eyes of her daughter were dry. For her sorrow she had no right to weep.

And now the aged deacon received the symbol from the white hand of his pastor with humility; and the heresy-hunter recalled the fact that the Lord's Supper was not a doctrine.

The butterfly had drifted away from the roses, and was searching the quiet church like a fair spirit seeking a fit body, or a high impulse trying to find a noble deed. Only the minister had noticed the butterfly, and he now sat with his hand above his eyes.

Mrs. Alford had not moved when the deacon offered her the great silver plate, now nearly empty of its broken bread. She declined with a gentle gesture. The heresy-hunter with the prehistoric face did not turn in the lady's direction. But the ferret in his eyes looked out.

Light, which moves at one hundred and eighty-six thousand miles a second and more; electricity, which

takes a pace as inconceivable — are laggards beside excited thought. Mrs. Alford was unconscious of the rate that hers was making; she seemed herself to be racing with it, and able to estimate the speed of it by the wind in her face, like one in an observation-car rushing through a high country. In those few moments — they may have been fifteen — since she came into the church, half her life blew by her. It was as if everything to which she had formed the habit of resolutely shutting her eyes started out and stared upon her — foregrounds that she had long ignored, perspective that she had actually forgotten. She dashed like a reluctant traveler whirled past scenes which he had neither cared nor dared to revisit because their delight was lost while their distress remained — as pain does remain, lasting longer than joy in the sensation of any but the superficial.

Mrs. Alford's was not a superficial sensibility. She could not "throw things off," as we say. She did not find it easy to elude her consciousness of her personal tragedy. The heart of a woman of her type is the finest photographer in the world. The retina of her imagination is more sensitive than that of the truest camera, and her memory was stored with inexorable plates; these she had spent years trying in vain to break.

One might say, rather, that hers was the retina of

the Claude Lorrain; everything that it reflected was exquisite, but set in black — whichever way she turned it, her fate, or the forecast of her fate, looked out at her. It was as if the delicacy of her impressions increased her capacity for misery more than it had enhanced her capaciousness of happiness. In a word, it was so long since she had been happy that she had forgotten how to be. This was the more fortunate, because opportunities for the exercise of this lost art did not present themselves.

She belonged to the great army of the disillusioned who begin by believing marriage a sacrament, and end by feeling it a profanation. It was now nearly two years since she had seen her husband — or no: one day they had met at their lawyer's; it was necessary for her to sign something; she had done as she was asked, and they had parted at the office door; it had occurred to her to invite Gerald home to dinner — she would have done as much for any old acquaintance,— but, in the embarrassment of the moment, she had hesitated just long enough for him to observe that he was going directly aboard the steamer, which sailed at six in the morning. So she had not said it. They shook hands, and he lifted his hat. She had noticed that his hair was beginning to whiten at the temples. As she sat at the communion service she found herself occupied in trying to recall whether his mustache were still black.

Then she remembered that he had his gloves off, and that she had noticed the old scar on the third finger of the left hand; he had splashed it with hot sealing-wax one day. She had on a rose-colored muslin, and a spark from the candle caught the dress. What a cry he had given when he clasped her, and extinguished the little blaze against his rough coat! He had loved — oh, he had loved her! And she —

The ravages of her feeling had been heavy; it had harrowed her; she was a waste, because overcultivated, land; that the very roots of tenderness were dying in her she was critically aware.

She was a sincere woman — she never posed before her own heart — and she had lately begun to suspect in herself a certain tendency which she was quite capable of despising, as if her finer sensibilities were running to weeds: as, for instance, why was she where she was to-day? She had distinctly purposed not to come. What power unclassified had drawn her on? The question disturbed her. It shot athwart her reverie as if it were a bolt of blue lightning flung across a passionate sunset. Her husband's face, her husband's voice, fled before it like riven clouds. Then they came back, closing in, massing, blazing higher than, brighter than, before.

Love may be a torch, flickering for a fête; it may be a domestic brush-fire, burning decorously as long

as the material lasts; it may be a conflagration that runs till it laps the edge of the river Lethe.

Hermione and her husband had found the map of existence destroyed and recreated by their attachment. For eight years they had believed themselves to have secured the joy everlasting. Both were of the order of souls who perceive that a pure and permanent love between man and woman is the greatest thing in the world, and both believed that marriage may offer this exquisite justification of the mystery of living.

How had they suffered the blinding vision to evade their darkened eyes? Where had the wonder gone? How had it eluded them? How did it all happen? For the life of her lost happiness she could not have told. Bowed there on the rail of the bony pew, with its stigmata on her burning forehead, and the crape of the widow's veil blackening between herself and the sacred table — she sifted the ashes of her life scornfully. For what, then, had they lost the glamour of the sacred fire? What had disenchanted them? Was it a turn of the head, a trick of the eye, a lapse of the tongue? Was it a glacier in the will? Was it a geyser of the temper?

There seemed to her now, as she thought of it, a touch of something half humorous in her desolation — that she should have been brought to the pass she was without the dignity of a great tragedy. No moral

cataclysm had sundered them. Gerald was fastidious in his way; he was a gentleman; he did not intrigue with other women. The tables of stone had not been broken between them. His rendering of the graven letters had been as steady as her own. Perhaps in the last analysis it had been steadier, or at least clearer. She found herself wondering if he, since their separation, had admitted to his consciousness moments of weakness such as she had known this last year; to do him justice, she doubted if he had. She thought of him as setting his teeth, and attending to his business methodically — forgetting her, no doubt (oh, yes, Gerald could forget better than she could), but respecting to the margin of his imagination the tie which still bound them. She did not believe that he had gone maudlin over his loneliness, or dabbled in the clouded spring of accessible sympathies. Whether this were true of Gerald Alford or not, it was the beautiful thing about Hermione that she thought so.

It was her lovely "way." She had always believed the best of men — of the men for whom she cared. Her father was a commonplace person, but she had never found it out. Her brother was a rascal, but she had idealized him until he died. Marriage had broken her heart, and she and her husband had parted, but she went on saying, "Gerald would never do that," "Gerald would be sure to do this," as if they had been living and loving together still.

There had been no legal separation at all; scarcely a public scandal, yet. It was understood that Alford's business had become of a character which compelled him to travel. It was said that some sensitiveness to malarial influences would not permit Mrs. Alford to live in Brazil, and that her physical delicacy, indeed, was of a sort which forbade frequent sea-voyages; in short, the social fictions had been respectably preserved up to this time. It had occurred to Hermione that the serial novel might not run much longer. But her minister — her summer minister — was the first person to broach to her distinctly this unpleasant truth.

"Where is Mr. Alford?" he had said abruptly, one day in May. She came early now, earlier than they used to come, to her summer home. She had nothing else to do. There was nowhere else she wanted to go. She crept into the Berkshire cottage like a hurt thing that had been torn from its shell and crawls back to heal if it can.

"He is in Paris — that is," she corrected herself (she never could tell a half-truth to Daniel True), "he was when I heard from him last."

"And how long ago," continued the pastor, with no apology for the question, "was that?"

"It is three months," she replied, without hesitation or resentment. It seemed as natural for her to allow as it was for him to assume the priestly prerogative.

"What does this mean?" demanded the Reverend Mr. True, authoritatively. "That is, if you don't mind telling me," he added, in the personal tone. She would have thought that she should mind telling him very much indeed. But she found her reluctance suddenly and subtly failing her. She began, in point of fact, to justify herself.

"I was miserable," she urged. "I was too miserable to bear the disillusions of married life — its disappointments. I was hurt all the time. We had been very happy — happier than most people. So, I suppose, we suffered more when — Not that I would have you think I blame my husband!" She lifted her head with a desolate pride. "I was as much to blame as he; I tired him; sometimes he thought I nagged him. I was too easily wounded. I could not overlook little things as I might have, as it seems to me now that I could."

"Was there any great — that is, any greater thing?" asked the pastor, gravely. "Forgive me. I wish to help you. I do not put the question idly. I do not *want* you to go into details. I am not urging any confidence that you would regret — nothing that I ought not to hear. But perhaps — if I understood a little better —"

The unwedded man hesitated; a fine change of expression ennobled his delicate features.

"Of course," he said, "if you would rather not —"

The dreary eyes of the wife lifted and fell.

"There was something," she admitted. "I cannot tell you —"

"I do not wish you to!" he interrupted. "Could you forgive it?" he persisted gently.

"Oh, yes, I could forgive it — now."

"Not then?"

"No, not at the time. I was — I suffered too much."

Hermione, receiving no reply to these words, turned her beautiful head abruptly. The minister was looking at her with a strong steadiness; his lips were locked; in his eyes an angel seemed to sit on guard beside a tomb.

"I am sorry that you — must suffer," he said, in a very low voice. He rose, and took his hat.

"I never met anything like it," began Mrs. Alford. She was impulsive sometimes, for a woman of the world. "I mean such sympathy as yours — not one so delicate, and so — so *right*. It helps me, Mr. True."

"No," he answered sharply, "it does not help you. It is not helping anybody."

He wheeled and crossed the room. Then he came back. The woman of the world sat with cheeks scorching like a girl's.

"Forgive me," he said manfully. "I have blundered. I have spoken without tact. I am not accustomed to the surfaces of society — as you are. I am

trying to do the best thing, to find the right way, that 's all. I am afraid the expression of sympathy is not the way."

"Have I ever sought it?" she cried proudly.

"You have never sought anything," he answered, with a reverent inclination of his head.

From that hour the subject of her unhappy marriage had never been mentioned by either. It was the first time, and the last. The memory of it wavered between them like a tendril without a trellis, unsustained and groping, quivering in mid-air.

Yet Hermione found herself able to recall the interview without discomfort. She was forced to suspect that a power not herself had determined that she should. Aching under the dislocation of her painful position (she neither wife nor divorcée), she was accustomed to hold herself haughtily. She was used to averting the admiration of men; she distanced their society and denied their friendship. It had been her habit to protect them. She perceived that this country parson, this inexperienced, unmarried man, was able to take care of himself. It hardly occurred to her that he might be guarding her.

At the communion service she thought of these things without fear, and without reproach. She did not lift her eyes to the table with the white cloth and glittering silver; she prayed that there should be nothing in her heart which she must veil before that

sacred sight. The pastor had now arisen to bless the cup. A fold of the widow's veil swept against Mrs. Alford's white hat and soft, thin cheek. She did not move. A late communicant, coming in quietly, had taken a seat beside her; but her consciousness could hardly be said to have grasped the circumstance. She sat remote from the trivial, devout and sweet.

The minister began to pray:

"Lord, Thou hast given us the cup of life. We have drunk deeply of it — not as Thou wouldst, but as we willed."

The stranger, near the summer parishioner, had been sitting straight and stiff. At these words he bowed his head, and his forehead fell reverently upon the rail beside Hermione. As he did so, something indeterminate emanated from his presence — a subtle medium — one could not say to which of the senses it would have appealed, if to any. Hermione thought of the N-ray, which is said to assume the hues of a personality, of a given emotion or passion. It seemed to her that if she looked, she should see the color that she felt streaming between herself and this unknown man. Her mind slipped from the sacred symbols. A fierce human pang drove through and through her. The remembrance of her Lord, the prayer of her pastor, the aspiration of her religious nature — what were they? What could they have meant a moment ago? She was rent with that which extinguished

heaven and earth. What had befallen her? Was it a memory, or a prophecy? A link of thought? or a tint of feeling? She was thrilling with a consciousness of buried joy, a sense of its infinite resources, of its deserted hopes. In that country church she found herself confronted with a miracle. Her married love arose with all its grave-clothes on and looked at her.

Panting with her emotion, she turned her head and pushed the widow's veil aside, that she might gain air (for she found it difficult to breathe) and still not reveal her agitated face. The worshiper beside her moved when she did, and his hand, which was clenched upon his knee, opened and relaxed. It was the left hand, and Hermione saw upon its third finger, just above the wedding-ring, a deep white scar; such as might be made by a drop of burning wax. . . .

The village church spun and vanished about her. With rose on her dress, and rose in her heart, and youth in her veins, she stood in a whirlwind of fire. Arms clasped her, lips touched her, passionate words adjured her. She could feel the rough nap of her husband's woolen coat against which she was held. She thought she had cried out audibly: "Gerald! Did you burn your hands?" But her lips had not moved—no, nor a muscle of her fair body. The lace fan fell from her fingers; that was all. The butterfly drifted

towards the flowers on the pulpit and swayed away. The homely scent of the syringas floated in. The praying voice of the pastor filled the silent church.

There had been but one passenger that afternoon on the Sunday train, and when the newspapers were slapped off and tossed upon the box of the muddy cab, its driver had leisurely approached the traveler.

"You won't find her to home," he had said, with the familiarity of a fellow townsman. "She 'll be to meetin'. It's communion afternoon. Drive you up?"

"I 'll walk," replied the passenger, shortly. He had, in fact, taken his time about it. Once on the way he had stopped under a chestnut-tree and drawn a letter from his pocket. This he read and reread, with the pertinacity of a man who already knew its contents by heart, and who was perplexed or profoundly moved by them. He replaced the letter carefully in his breast pocket, and walked on more rapidly. As he walked he felt for the crackling paper occasionally, to make sure that it was there. Thus the letter ran: —

"Dear Alford: — I have that to say which a man does not usually say to another — and it is not easy to do. I have decided that I ought to do it.

"I am only your summer pastor, and you may not view as I do the obligation under which I feel myself

to the most transient of my people — the responsibility, I mean, to be of service to them, if I can.

"That sort of thing is not easy to explain to a man who was never in the pulpit. No layman knows how a pastor feels about such matters. But you and I are more than pastor and parishioner; we are friends — so here it is, Alford, and out with it.

"I am writing this letter with the distinct purpose of asking you to return to your wife, and I do not qualify in any way, nor do I apologize for this, as you will justly say, extraordinary request. I make it; I repeat it; I urge it; and there it stands. I do not even explain the process by which I have arrived at the making of it. I will go farther, and say that I urge your return without delay.

"What has separated you two I do not know. We have exchanged but a few words, she and I, upon the subject. When I see you I will tell you, if you wish it, what these were. Mrs. Alford is a reserved woman; she bears her painful position with dignity; she does not babble of her miseries. But she cannot conceal the effect that they are having upon her.

"It is true that I am — I do not need you to remind me of it — a solitary man. The sacred joys, the intricate perplexities of married life I have not experienced, and perhaps I never shall. Is it not possible that for this very reason I am more, rather than less, qualified to recall you to its obligations and its privi-

leges? To me these seem, even in the least successful marriage, so inexorable, so valuable, that I find it hard to understand how a man can disregard them. They seem to me worth the world and all that is therein.

"Alford! come back to her. Don't wait to question why. Come at once, and ask no questions. Why, man! you vowed to guard her — the tenderest, the most love-needy of women — you know what she is. How could you set her drifting like this? If she had not been the noblest, as she is the tenderest; if her own soul had not been a flame of white fire scorching every unworthy thing or thought out of her presence — to what accidents of the sensibilities might you have exposed her?

"It is these exquisite natures, these sensitives, who are most in peril. I don't mean — a man would be a savage who could conceive of their moral danger in his lowest thought, — but I mean the peril of accumulated pain, easy to prevent, impossible to cure. A woman of her kind can bear only about so much loneliness. I tell you she has borne all she can.

"Alford, I give you my word, as your friend and hers, that she loves you; perhaps more, but not less, than she did. I tell you we ministers — yes, even we unwedded ones — may be better equipped than you suppose to offer counsel to people in positions like yours.

"The Protestant Church has its own confessional. I am not without my experience in that.

"I do not think that Mrs. Alford is well this spring. I am confident that she is losing strength. She is very unhappy. I don't care what the causes of your separation were; it makes no difference who was right or who was wrong; nothing makes any difference. The wrong is that you two should remain apart. The right is that you should be together. I ask you to take the next steamer; and I am,

Your friend and minister,

DANIEL TRUE.

"P. S. — She does not know that I have written this letter. You will do as you please, of course, but perhaps it may be as well that she should not know."

The reverent house was still. The minister stood with the silver goblet in his hand. His praying voice was distinct and low. It was long remembered among his people that it vibrated that day with strange emotion.

"Lord, make us less unworthy to touch this cup with our lips — our lips, that err so often and are so weak. They tremble as they drink. Make us fit for the sacrifices and the privileges of love — the heavenly love, and the earthly. Teach us its sanctity. Qualify us for its preciousness and its purity —"

In the rear pew, empty of all but its two communi-

cants, a man's hand with a scar on it slid out timidly and appealed to the woman sitting beside him. She saw that it shook; it stole to her lap and lay suppliant upon her knee. She had now raised her face, tear-discolored, and with the stigmata on her forehead. When he saw how worn she was, how changed, a choked word fought for articulation, and fell defeated in the listening silence. She thought he had tried to say, —

"*Hermione!*"

She did not turn her head; but her hand crept towards him and his closed upon it.

Above the tall figure of the pastor, the white butterfly was circling delicately; it hovered over his head as if it sought and loved him. A fine imagination might have recalled the dove that hovered above the head of another Preacher as he stood mid-stream in Jordan receiving the chrism of his life's work.

The voice of the minister sank to a supreme solemnity: "*Behold I give you this cup. Drink ye all of it.*"

The people stirred and lifted praying faces. The deacon and the heresy-hunter took the silver goblet meekly from the pastor's hand. The heresy-hunter did not remember if anything or anybody were "sound." The deacon's boots creaked softly down the main aisle. The widow wiped her eyes, and threw her crape veil back. Her daughter did not look

towards the pulpit; she sat with downcast, patient lashes. The boy and girl across the aisle exchanged a gentle look, and honored one another; they thought, "Some day this good man shall marry us." Each heart received its own sacrament, and went its own way.

Two communicants stayed yet with heads bowed and faces hidden. But their hands were clasped. When the silver chalice reached them, last of all, it was nearly empty; a few heart-red drops remained. The man and the woman put the shining brim to their lips; they found the holy wine and drank all of it.

But the minister sat with his face covered from the people, and his heart open to his God.

"TAMMYSHANTY"

THE boy curled astride the bowsprit of the schooner, and looked over into the thick water.

There are certain defects in early education of which one is so poignantly conscious at so tender an age that they might as well be, since they seem, irreparable.

Not to have experienced more than a term or two at night school, not to be able to offer evidential parents to society, not to have any home more concrete than the wharves, the bridges, the railroad yard, or a stray bed at the newsboys' lodge, and not to command an appreciable income — these are inferior circumstances about which one does not concern one's self. Not to know how to swim — that is the irrevocable, that is the fatal thing. There is about this affliction an air of finality against which human hope cannot wrestle. The boy felt that it would be easier to get into prison and out again than it would ever be to get into the lake and out.

Once he had ventured to "do time" like a man, but he had escaped like a monkey. Once he had tried to swim, and it had taken two doctors and two hours to resuscitate his valuable life. He had long since

come to look upon criminal careers and nautical sports as equally serious and objectionable. But the rebound of attraction to that which one has renounced is as inevitable as the nature of gutta-percha. The boy hung upon the bowsprit and dared himself to drop.

"I stump yer!" he said.

The schooner was silent, and to all intents empty. The cook who was left in charge of her slept the sleep of too much and too recent shore leave. The wharf, deserted, blistered in the scorching noon. An ore barge that had lain alongside was laboring out in charge of a tug which never washed its face. There had been a couple of men fishing in a boat, but these had rowed away.

A pauper dog sat on a pile of lumber to view the scenery; but he had a misanthropic and preoccupied air; he did not notice the boy. There was not so much as a policeman, to say, "Move on, now!"

The child had taken off his clothes, excepting for a rag of underwear, and looked like a crab, half in, half out of its shell. He clung with a desperate daring, born of his conscious timidity, peeping over into the black-green depths; these seemed as solid as malachite, and as impenetrable. He hung by one dirty hand, then by the other — by two grimy feet, then by one — then by all fours; by his chin, on his stomach, by anything, on anywhere, unable to plunge, unable to

refuse to plunge — a grotesque little image of irresolution. No observant deity interfered with it.

Now, the bowsprit was shiny and slippery; and the boy was sprawly and not very strong; he had not had much to eat for a few days — in fact, he seldom did have very much.

It would not have been easy to say which came first, the splash or the cry. Without intention to defy the suicide laws of his paternal state, the lad was in the water, whence a final trapeze performance sustained upon one foot and one finger had hurled him.

He dropped, and sank, and rose, and shrieked. But the cook who had too much shore leave did not turn in his bunk in the hot fo'castle. The boy sank, and rose again, and this time he did not shriek.

His hair was red — the red that one might expect of a tiger lily crossed with a dahlia — the live, deep-bodied red, touched with orange and flaming. As he came up his head flared on the black water like a torch sputtering before it should be extinguished. He threw up his little thin, naked arms. As he went down he felt himself gripped, and after a while slapped in the face by something.

The pauper dog, who had been cynically regarding the lake, turned his neck slowly to look at the drowning boy — but after that he did nothing slow. He sprang, he leaped, he plunged, he swam; each impressive motion as swift as a noble feeling. Only a

kinetoscope could have followed the movements of the flying, battling creature. He was not a handsome dog, but the beauty of the merciful nature was in him; its grand unconsciousness, its splendid disregard of self. To these things a muscle responds, as well as a mind.

The shore officer who ran down to the wharf felt the moisture start in his experienced eyes as he saw the sight. The two men in the boat rowed back with tremendous strokes, shouting:—

"Good dog! Good fellow! Have him, sir! Get him, sir!"

The cook waked, and staggered up the companion-way, and said:—

"Damn!"

But the boy and the dog said nothing at all—the one because he was too weak and the other because he was too busy. The child had resigned himself instinctively to his rescuer, and did not struggle. The pauper dog had seized the drowning lad by his little ragged underwear, and tugged at that stolidly, pulling and treading water with his paws.

A dreadful fact had now forced itself upon the animal's intelligence — either he was too small or the boy was too large. In a general way he had always observed that there were bigger dogs than he, but he had never been convinced that he was not their equal, or superior, when it came to the point. When he

found that he could not support the weight of the lad, an intense mortification overcame him. Now mortification, when it does not crush, stimulates, and the dog's body, fighting not to be drawn under by the human body, became brain all over where it was not heart, and heart wherever it was not brain.

The animal perceived a chance — his only one — and took it. A rope's end trailed from the rail of the schooner and writhed like a snake in the water. The dog seized and dragged the snake. No man who saw it could say afterwards how it was done; but every stupid, helpless, laggard human of them agreed that the dog and the rope united before the rope and the boy did. One little purple hand reached, and missed, and rose, and clutched — and clung. The lad sprawled dangling; the cook, swearing, held down his drunken arms.

But the two in the boat rowed up on a spurt, and the Good Angel of the Gamin (if there be such a minister of grace) ordained that they should not be too late. The fishermen jerked the little fellow off the rope and in upon the thwarts, where he lay dripping and lobster red. Then, pausing only to let off a curse or two upon the cook, they started back to the wharf with their passengers.

When they had covered a considerable space of fluent malachite it occurred to them in a leisurely way to look back. A little brown spot undulated through

the water at their wake; slowly, as if it found difficulty in moving. One of the rowers asked: —

"Where's the dog, Jim?"

"Great Scott!" said Jim. "That must be him. Looks kinder tired, don't he, Bill?"

"Nigh petered out," admitted Bill contritely. "Put about, an' be quick, you!"

With swift and powerful oars the two men put about, and brought up against the dog, who was swimming feebly, as if exhausted by his late exertion.

So Bill penitently pulled him aboard, and Jim said, "Good fellow!" and the boat resumed her course to the wharf. The boy had crawled from the thwarts to the bottom, and lay sputtering and shivering; he did not say "Good fellow" to anybody, either man or dog. When the men had spilled their passengers upon the wharf they rowed away about their business, nodding, and reprimanding the boy: —

"Don't do it again, you!"

The child blinked at them stupidly. His purple lips opened and moved several times, but nothing of value to the world came from them; he did not know how to thank anybody for a kindness; in his whole life he had never received enough to learn the art.

The fishermen rowed off. The cook on the schooner swore at the boy for a few minutes, and went below to finish his nap. The wharf officer came up and patted the dog, and shook the boy, and told him

to move on when he got dry. Then he, too, went away.

The boy and the dog remained upon the wharf; dripping and shivering, they eyed each other cautiously. The dog saw a red head and freckles, a purple human crab, and a stealthy human grin to which he felt an inclination to respond. The boy saw an Irish terrier. He was a mongrel, and of a considerable size; his tail was stubbed to a humorous shortness, but his ears were uncut; the shock of hair above his eyes was larger and thicker than usual, and gave to the slow imagination of the lad the impression of a tam-o'-shanter cap. The dog's eyes were fine and sad. At the moment they gleamed with something between pride and fear. The animal seemed to be uncertain whether he should expect to be praised or beaten for the deed that he had done. He regarded the boy with the alert wariness that one sees sometimes in the eyes of an experienced old Irishman who has met a new type of employer. After some silent reflection the boy cautiously observed:—

"Hullo!" He had something of the diffidence that he once felt when he talked with a little deaf mute. It occurred to him that the dumb dog had more ways of speaking than the dumb child. Tail, eyes, ears, tongue, throat, each and all knew how to listen and to answer. The boy felt that he and the dog already experienced conversation. With growing confidence he repeated:

"Hullo!"

"Hullo yourself," barked the dog.

"Hully gee," said the boy.

"Hully gee," returned the dog.

"Cold, ain't it? You bet!"

"You bet," rejoined the dog.

"Deep, warn't it? Darn deep," suggested the boy.

"Darned deep," agreed the dog.

"Say," said the boy slowly, "I hain't never had nobody do nothin' for me like you done."

To this the terrier did not reply, but the experienced Celt in his eyes came out and scruntinized the lad, as if he weighed the probable meaning of the words.

"You ain't no relation, nuther," added the boy. A flash in the face of the Irish dog seemed to retort, "Doncher be too sure of that."

Now the boy hesitatingly extended a little dripping hand, and laid it on the terrier's drenched tam-o'-shanter. The child could not remember that he had ever caressed anything, even a dog or a kitten; and he did not know how. The dog recognized the attention by a pleasant wag of his too-short tail.

"Say," said the boy, "you 'n' me might be pals."

The dog assented politely.

"I hain't got no partikkelar place to put up," admitted the boy, by way of apology.

The obvious reply, "I hain't none myself," did not

come from the dog. The process of thought was too complicated.

"Was you ever hungry?" asked the boy.

The terrier threw up his dripping head, and laughed.

"I be myself, sometimes," explained the boy. "But somethin' or nothin', half 's yourn. See?"

"I see," said the dog.

"Me name," observed the boy incidentally, "is Peter Roosevelt Tammany."

The dog permitted himself a look of pained perplexity.

"But they *calls* me Jack the Marineer. That's cos I can't swim. Me common Monday edition name is Jacket. Got any name of yer own?"

The dog hung his wet head with embarrassment.

"How 's Tammyshanty?" asked the boy.

The dog uttered a hilarious howl. Jacket hesitated for a reply, instinctively seeking something more serious than profane. Now and then, at Christmas time, he had wandered into Sunday-school, and he raked his memory for a sacred phrase.

"Amen," he said, after some thought.

"Amen," replied the dog. The shivering lad solemnly put his arm about the neck of the drenched and shaking animal, and whistled something haughtily, as if he had been the owner of large private kennels. The terrier leaped and sprang to the sound.

The boy hunted up his ragged clothes, and he and the dog passed soberly up the wharf together.

In the prelude to any union of spirits there is a solemn moment; and something of the seriousness of an intimate relation settled upon the gamin and the mongrel, as they trotted into the city and disappeared from the lenient eye of the wharf officer, who smiled, as if he had heard a good story which might bear repeating.

Love is a variety in unity, and we hear much, but not too much, about it. We read forever of the love of man and woman, and the love of a mother for a child; we study love as the chief lesson of life, and the choice material of art. In the great heart of human feeling at whose beats we listen, have we thought it quite worth while to count the love of a boy for a dog? A friendless boy for a homeless dog? One should add: A loveless boy for an unloved dog?

Jacket the gamin and Tam o' Shanter the terrier came together in one strong dramatic moment and united like rain-drops, or waves, or flame. What had life been to either without the other? In a week, in a day, it became impossible to imagine. The outcast animal, longing always for an unknown master, accepted the sweet servitude rapturously. The desolate child, knowing neither the name nor the fact of love, he who had no human tie, and knew no human ten-

derness, received with almost incredible emotion the allegiance of the dog. The swish of a stubby tail, the kiss of a pink tongue, the clasp of scrawny paws, the mute worship of dark, pursuant eyes — these became the events of a day, and mounted to the romance of existence. For such signs that he was dear to something the lad watched with an idealization that was well-nigh poetic; and for such cumulative evidence that anything was dear to him, he lived. A few men, but not many, remember or understand the capacity for affection in the soul of the boy. Behind the rough bark what fine sap flows! Below the blazonry, the bluff, the vulgarity, if you will, of a neglected lad, what gentle, what delicate fibres hide!

The gamin acquired that splendid fortune which may be the supreme ennobler of a human creature — he had experienced a great passion. Prince or poet may live and die and miss it, or even never know that he has missed it. Jacket the newsboy had found it, and recognized the fact. Everything that he felt, everything that he had was the pauper dog's — the child's poor corner in the attic of the tenement where he had become a lodger because he felt that Tam o' Shanter needed a home and shelter; the scantiest meals that ever were earned out of a bad day's business, or the biggest that good luck gave a fellow now and then — half of everything there was went to the patient, snuggling terrier, who never begged,

who never grabbed, who ate silently, it seemed under protest, when the larder was low. The first quarter that the lad could save gave the dog a strap collar, laboriously marked in indelible ink with a master's name and street and number. One day a deluded philanthropist who had inquired into the circumstances gave two dollars to license the dog. The philanthropist was an old man, with an old-fashioned gray beard, and a water-proof coat; he did not look like every other man; he was an officer in some society that occupied itself with the reduction of human cruelty; but that the street child could not know, nor would he have understood it if he could.

Among the recorded good deeds of many serious years it may be doubted if the gray man in the water-proof coat had ever done a wilder, kinder act than when he flung two dollars into the bottomless sea of gamin life, and trusted an unwatched boy to spend it for the protection of an unlicensed dog.

When Jacket returned from the city hall he lifted his red head proudly. He had become a property holder; Tammyshanty was a tax-payer; both were citizens; they celebrated the event by an extravagant supper. They bought a big bone with much meat on it, cooked it between two stones and an old piece of funnel in a vacant lot, and divided the consequences. In the development of their mutual affection the two tried to interchange tastes, if not natures. Tammy-

shanty would have lived on apples and potatoes (to which he cultivated a hopeless objection) for his master's sake. The lad would have eaten bones, if he could, for the dog's.

That night they slept ecstatically, Tammyshanty upon the foot of his master's ragged bed. A dozen times a night, whether asleep or awake, the boy felt about with his foot to make quite sure that the dog was there. In cold weather he covered Tammyshanty with his own ragged coat. With some vague reminiscence of his too-brief Sunday-school existence, he had taught the terrier to say his prayers at night. When one cried "Amen!" in a deep, religious voice, Tammyshanty barked, and jumped into bed. In the morning the two kissed rapturously, but sometimes sadly, for it was not always safe or possible to take Tammyshanty upon a journalistic career in the crowded crossings of Newspaper Row. The dog was in the habit of going to the corner of the alley with the newsboy, and returning home alone. There, on the broken steps of the tenement, he sat, a statue of a dog, whom neither fights nor fires, kicks nor caresses could allure, and waited for the lad. If it were very stormy or cold, Tammyshanty climbed to the attic bedroom, and watched soberly through a broken window, listening for a whistle or a call at which the heart of a dog must leap like climbing foam.

"Peppers! Peppers! Tammyshanty! Oh — oo — ee! Tammyshantee!"

Down the steps or down the stairs, across the alley, up the alley — to run as the heart runs, how short a time it takes! Sometimes twice, never more than that, the lad may cry: —

"Pep — pers! Oh — oo — ee! Tammyshantee!"

Then, with clasping arms and paws, with little laughs of delight and yaps of joy, boy and dog are one.

Now it befell that one day, when business was dull, the two went out for pleasure, and took a walk of considerable length. A brown brick house came in their way, a house with an ell, and a yard; a gloomy house, whose shades were drawn. It had old-fashioned wooden shutters, of a dingy white, and in the ell the lad noticed that the shutters were closed.

A man stood in the vestibule of the house. He was a middle-aged man, dressed as a gentleman dresses. For some reason he did not strike the gamin as being a gentleman. The man's face was heavily lined, like a piece of old leather that has been folded into certain creases so long that it cannot smooth out. His eyes were cold, like Bessemer steel, and might have been as useful, for they were not stupid eyes; but something in their expression was indescribably repulsive. Jacket, who was whistling, glanced and stopped. The street boy was shrewd — as the tribes of the street are in the interpretation of character.

"That 's a fine dog of yours," observed the man.

"You bet," replied Jacket, proudly; but he walked on, without stopping. Tam o' Shanter followed with a passionate docility.

"I 'll give you fifty cents for him," pursued the man in the vestibule. He came down the steps and out upon the sidewalk as he spoke. "Here."

He held out a long, sinuous hand, in which a piece of silver glittered. The boy and the dog stopped. The Irish terrier set his teeth and growled. Jacket threw back his red head.

"Fifty cents! *Me? For my dog?* You must 'a' come from 'way back." The child laughed. "You must be orful green for a fellar of yer size," he added.

"Fifty cents is a good deal of money," returned the man with the Bessemer eyes. "I don't know but I 'll make it sixty; seventy-five if you want to drive a bargain. I 've been wanting a dog."

The boy seemed, on the instant, to grow before the man's eyes — as if he had been another man — and to tower above his elder and by all the standards of the world his superior. A terrible torrent of profanity poured from the gamin's quivering lips: —

"I would n 't sell that there dog for — not for *seventy-five dollars!*" Jacket enunciated the words slowly, striving to express the inconceivable in the way of monetary values. Once or twice he had seen a ten-

dollar bill. Once in his life he had handled five dollars. He dwelt upon this computation of human wealth with awe.

Then he turned upon his ragged heel.

"Peppers! Pep — pers! *Wireless* extry! Oh — oo — ee? Tammyshantee!"

The soprano cry whistled down the alley. It was night, and a dark one; a winter night, some five weeks or so after the incident of the brick house. It was snowing, and very cold. The boy's feet were wet, and he shivered as he hurried home. From a business point of view it had not been a bad day, and tucked tight under his ragged elbow the newsboy held his supper — their supper; his and Tammyshanty's; a scrap of cooked beef, cast out from a poor restaurant for a poor but possible price.

"I'll give him the biggest half," thought the child. "He 's the littlest. See?"

There had been no answer to his call, and Jacket lurched into a run, repeating shrilly: —

"Oh — oo — ee! Tammyshantee!"

As he ran he listened for the sure, dear bark. The lad's lips moved, muttering: —

"Must be so stormy I can't hear him. Oh — oo — ee! Tammyshantee? Must be up attic. That's wot's 'e matter. Must 'a' got shet in somewheres. Oh — oo — ee! Tammyshantee? He 'll be settin' in 'e winder

a-watchin' an' a-yappin' like to split hisself. Oh—oo—ee!"

He pushed on, sprinting through the piling drifts, jerked the fringe of snow from his forelock and eyebrows, and raked the tenement from roof to cellar in one sharpened glance. The dog was not upon the doorsteps; the broken window was empty of his little watching, anxious, Irish face. Jacket dashed on, and up four flights of broken stairs, burst open the door of his attic, and fell in panting.

A wisp of snow had drifted through the broken pane upon the foot of the cot where the child and the dog slept. There was of course no fire, and the attic was very cold. It occurred to Jacket that it was cold enough to freeze even an Irish terrier, and he gasped and gazed. But the bed was as empty as the window. The dog was not in the room.

At the moment when I pause in the story, as one pauses before the thing from which one shrinks, my eyes chance upon these words chosen from one of the people's philosophies of our epigram-loving day:—

"*You don't know all of grief and loneliness unless you are a boy, and have lost a pet dog.*"

The first of it seemed, at the time, the worst of it; though afterwards the lad came to know that it was not. He spent that night in the storm, baffled and beaten, searching alleys and yards, and tenements,

calling upon neighbors, friends and foes, newsboys, messengers, letter-carriers, girls in flaunting hats, all the population that exists by locomotion of the throbbing streets. He went so far — and it is difficult for the sheltered and respectable and mature to estimate the extent of this tremendous step — as to consult the arch enemy of mortal man, the police of his own city. Towards midnight the storm stopped, but the little master's passionate search did not. He crawled about town until the gray of the dawn, then stumbled to his attic, and dropped down exhausted upon the bed where the wisp of snow had driven to a drift. There, curled in his drenched clothes, he sobbed and slept a little, and dreamed that Tammyshanty slept and sobbed beside him. In his dream the lad moved his cold foot, and felt about for the dog upon the bed.

"Say, Mister, hev you seen a lost dog anywheres? A *licensed* dog? A yaller dog, Mister? A pure mongrel Irish terrier dog? The purtiest t'ing of his kind you ever seen. Had a tammyshanty cap acrosst his eyes. You never seen such harnsome eyes. He warn't no common purp; *he* ain't no poorhouse dog. He's got his master's name — that's me, Peter Roosevelt Tammany — printed on his collar, sir. But I'll 'low they calls me Jacket gener'lly. An' my residence, Mister, my street and number in case anything happened to him. My dog's name is Tammy-

shanty. He 's a licensed dog. I t'ought I 'd find him long before now. See? Say, Mister, *sure* ye hain't seen any sech a dog? Not *any*wheres?"

This question, repeated a score of times a day, as many more by night, quivered plaintively through the city for a week, for two, for three; for more than the boy had kept the heart to count.

In his emergency he consulted all his old friends, and made some new ones. On the wharf endeared to him as the scene of love at first sight between himself and Tammyshanty, he sought, and as it befell, he found his rescuers, the two fishermen. He who was called Jim said:—

"Sho! Can't cher find him?"

But he who was called Bill said:—

"I 'll have a shy at lookin' for that yaller dog, myself."

The shore policeman strolled up and committed himself to the extent of saying, "That so?" and took the description and address of dog and master. Jacket had the pertinacity of purpose belonging to love and anguish. He went so far as to look for the drunken cook. But the schooner had vanished into the storm-swept, frowning lake.

The newsboys rallied around the bereaved child with the alert instincts of their calling. One passed the event to the other. A subterranean intelligence ran through the gamin world. In particular the afflicted

boy was aware of the sympathy — as dumb as a dog's, and almost as helpless — of two lads, officers in the Newsboys' Association, and bearing, in that important organization, their own dignities and titles, but known to an indifferent public as Freckles and Blinders.

"Dis t'ing otter be giv to de press," suggested Freckles.

"I 'll speak to me Paper 'bout it," observed Blinders with journalistic assurance. Jacket received this stupendous idea slowly. After giving it some silent consideration, he timidly sought his own favorite reporter upon his own staff and told the story of Tam o' Shanter. The reporter glanced up from his yellow pad.

"Why, that 's a pity!" he said kindly, and went on writing.

"Say, Mister, hev yer seen a dog? A yaller dog? A *licensed* dog? Wid his street 'n' number on his collar — 'n' his name, Tammyshanty, sir? Hair stood up all 'round his eyes. Master's name, that 's me — Peter Roosevelt Tammany — printed plain beside. Hain't seen him anywheres? Hain't ye seen *any* sort of a yaller dog? Hain't ye —"

The plaintive entreaty, now learned by heart, and reiterated by rote, fell from the lips of Peter Roosevelt Tammany as a bag of ballast drops from a balloon in full flight, and sank with a thud into a

guttural oath. The boy, blinded by grief, had failed to notice where he was or to whom he spoke. Now, the brick house with the ell and the drawn shades revealed itself like an unwelcome scene shifted suddenly upon a stage in an unpleasant people's play; and in the vestibule the man with the steel in his eyes stood looking down coldly.

"Go to thunder, *you!*" screamed the gamin. "Offerin' me money — *money!* — for me dog. Fifty cents — seventy-five — for a pure mongrel Irish terrier. Fished me outen 'e lake 'n' saved me life, blank yer! Cuddled in me neck an' — an' kissed me. Why, Mister, I 'd — I 'd *give* ye seventy-five dollars for my dog. I 'd git it someways er nuther. Prob-a'ly I 'd git it from me Pepper. Would n't mind ef I had ter steal it an' do time for it. Say! Look here! You! Come back, Mister! Look 'round here! You hain't — you hain't seen him anywheres, hev yer? Mister! Mister! Ef you did, ef yer ever should, you 'd be *kind* to him, would n't yer? Cos he's 'e littlest. See? You 'd let me know, would n't yer? He was sech an orful cunnin' dog — knowed so much — an' he wagged his tail so — 't wa' n't a very big one — when I got home — an' — an' *kissed* me, Mister —"

But the door of the brick house was shut.

Shrilling and sobbing, the child turned down the street unsteadily; he was seldom so demoralized; for composure and fortitude are newsboy traits. As he

reeled along, punching his grimy knuckles into his eyes, he ran against an old man, tall and gray, striding in a water-proof coat. Jacket, sputtering out of his bath of tears, recognized the philanthropist who had lavished the incredible sum of two dollars to license Tammyshanty.

"Oh, sir!" he cried. "Oh, sir!"

Wildly he related the circumstances of his experiences at the brick house.

"Ah?" said the old man, sharply. "Show me the place."

The two retraced their steps, and stood before the house. Most of its shades were closely drawn. In the ell the blinds were closed. It was a gloomy house, destitute, it seemed, of family ties, of the sense of home, of the consciousness of human love. While the old man and the boy stood regarding it, a strange sound escaped from the place; it accelerated, then lapsed; muffled, or perhaps stilled.

The child shivered and gasped:—

"Sounds like — sounds like it was —"

"Come away," said the old gentleman, quickly. He grasped the boy's hand and led him, hurrying down the street.

The reporter looked up from his yellow pad. Jacket stood panting, ragged cap in hand. His teeth chattered in his broad mouth.

"Freckles 'n' Blinders says" — he began. "De fellers says he *cuts 'em up*. Critters — an' — an' *dogs* — livin' ones — they heern 'em."

He babbled forth some one of the tragic tales which are so unwelcome to the sensibilities that it is more comfortable to doubt than to investigate their dark significance. The reporter whirled on the revolving chair of an absent editor — the religious one.

"Must be one of these private experimenters," he said below his breath. The chief was passing by, and stopped.

"They 're apt to do pretty rough work," added the subordinate. "Shall we take it up?"

The chief stood with his hands in his pockets, and regarded the boy; who cringed when he saw the great man shake his head. Jacket's faith in his "Pepper" was illimitable. That its strong arms encompassed all human powers, and some divine ones, he pathetically believed. His little body bent together like a shut jack-knife before the indifference of the managing editor.

"If there were any sort of story in it" — observed the chief. "It does n't strike me there is."

The pen that wrote the best "story" in the office sighed for its opportunity. But the young man's heart ached for the lad.

"Tell me," he urged gently. "All there is to tell. There might be *something* I could do."

Jacket did not answer. The reporter went out after him; but the child and the night had blended silently.

It was a wild night, and Jacket pushed weakly against the resistance of the brutal lake wind. He ran upon a little squad of whispering newsboys, but veered past them, volleying incoherent, piteous words. His head hung forward, and his tongue lolled from his mouth. It was as if he scented the brick house as a hound scents prey. He flung himself upon the high steps. Choking between sobs and curses, he demanded entrance by fingers and feet, by voice and fists, by prayers and oaths.

"Gimme my dog, ——you!—Mister! Dear Mister! *Please* gimme my dog. You got so many dogs an' I ain't got nothin' but him — I 'll set the cops on you. I 'll set my Pepper on you if you don't gimme my dog. Say, Mister, please, Mister, I 'll pay you for my dog. I 'll gin you a hundred dollars for Tammyshanty. My Pepper 'll start a public sooperscription for him. Don't you *darst* tech my dog. Tammyshantee? Tammyshantee? *A*men!"

The door of the house remained shut, and locked, and barred. Jacket shook it furiously, and fell back. Like a cat he climbed up the iron railing into the area; crawled beneath the blinded windows of the large ell, lay flat upon his stomach, and beat back his sobs to listen. Plucking up his broken voice he softly called:

"Oh — oo — ee! Tammyshantee?"

Was it accident, or answer? Did his brain reel with his misery? Or had the lonely lad recognized in that inaccessible inferno the cry of his own dog?

He dashed over the railing and tottered up the steps. There, a raging little figure, hurling blow after blow upon the unyielding door, his friends found him. It was the old philanthropist in the water-proof coat who took the child to his aged heart. But the reporter was there; and the shore policeman (now promoted to an inland beat) and the newsboys, Freckles and Blinders, cursing behind.

"Tree hunderd more of us is comin'!" screamed the lads. "We 'll smash de doors an' winders in! *We 'll* get Tammyshanty. You betcher life we will!"

But the policeman put out his awful hand and motioned back the thronging boys — three hundred of them, as their little officers had said.

"Nothing can get out that there yellow dog but just a search warrant," said the officer sadly enough. "And the judge he won't give it. He says the evidence is lackin'."

Chattering like monkeys, the newsboys clamored and pressed up against the office. The old philanthropist patted the child upon his arm. The reporter stood in the foreground; as if he cast his lot in with the boys.

For a moment law and humanity regarded each other silently. Then the newsboys broke into a yell.

It was taken up from the alley, from the sidewalk, from the windows of the neighboring houses, and swelled from the street beyond. Freckles pushed Blinders forward.

"Mr. Cop," said Blinders, "we repersent every paper in dis yer city. We ain't er goin' in for no free fight. We 're law-abidin' citizens, Cop, but we 're er goin' to hev dat dog. You betcher life!"

"I wish to Moses you could," admitted the officer. But he stood stolidly between the house and the muttering crowd.

Apparently baffled, the newsboys consulted in whispers, massed and turned away. The philanthropist and the reporter carried Jacket somewhere, and tried to make him eat or drink, to warm him or to comfort him; but the child, refusing, sat with a sly eye upon the door. While the reporter stirred the sugar in the coffee, and the philanthropist was paying for the beefsteak, the boy slid out of the restaurant like an eel out of a basket. He had not spoken a word. His face was pinched. He had ceased to sob. With the look of a little old man who was weary of life, but with the wings of childhood in his feet, he flew to the brick house. There, crawling flat beneath the windows of the ell, he lay and watched and listened. Once he faintly called:—

"Oh — oo — ee! Tammyshantee?"

Towards morning, when it grew pretty cold, he

climbed the iron fence, got back to the steps, and coiled himself against the barred door. His heart went through it like a battering ram. It was as if he could force his way in and draw the dog out.

Forty-eight hours is a long time to experience despair, but it is a short time in which to prepare for retribution. Of this the private experimenter found himself unexpectedly and poignantly aware. He sat alone among his victims, and eyed them with a grudging regret. It was well on towards midnight of the second day since the unpleasant scene which the uninstructed public had made upon his premises. The uninstructed public, as fate would have it, had not gone away appeased.

The brown brick house was in a state of siege. Neighbors hooted at the blinded windows; epithets and missiles assailed the man with the steel in his eyes if he raised a shade. A door he dared not open. He sat and cursed. He listened and quaked.

The street that night had grown impressively, almost unnaturally still. He did not ask himself whether there were any reason for this circumstance. It occurred to him that no time was likely to be better for the execution of the purpose that he had formed, and he proceeded to hasten his preparations furtively.

The man, in a word, had been brought to the pass of contemplating flight. Startled by the popular sus-

picion under which he had suddenly fallen, the vivisector gave up his dreadful game. He yielded it so far as the protection of his life and limb concerned him; he did not propose to yield his "material." He purposed, as is now well known, to betake himself and the doomed creatures in his power to some other, some safer lair; and to select for such a sally the small, dull hours after midnight, when the streets would be relatively quiet and suitable for his venture. The remarkable stillness in the region of the brick house misled him, and he decided to make the move at midnight.

He stepped stealthily about his laboratory. The place was dim, but it was not still. — This pen refuses to portray the sights which met the cold eyes so familiar with them that the man's nerves did not complain. Such of his subjects as could walk he urged to their feet, and leashed them.

It was perhaps half an hour after midnight when the locked iron gate of the area fence swung open cautiously, and a man peered out. The street was quite deserted. Not so much as a yawning officer was to be seen. The vivisector tiptoed out, and down the sidewalk. Behind him followed a strange and pitiable group. Dogs on leashes, as many as the hand could hold; dogs fastened abreast and tandem to a rope dragged at the heels of their tormentor, followed him with the beautiful docility which only the dog, of all

created beings, offers to the master man. It was not an uncommon thing for them to kiss his hand while they lay bound beneath his knife. At first this used to make him uncomfortable; but he had become quite accustomed to it.[1]

Skulking, with darting eyes, he dragged the dogs along. He congratulated himself that he was not disturbed. He was surprised at the freedom of his movements. He anticipated that his troubles were over. The fugitive physiologist had proceeded perhaps sixty feet when there burst upon him a sound before which that which he called his heart stood still. No man city born or bred ever mistakes that sound. It was the roar of an oncoming mob. It seemed to him for the moment as if the whole town had become a throat.

The tramp of feet advanced upon him with an ominous steadiness. Out of the dimly lighted streets the crowd took rapid form — neighbors and strangers, women and men. Sobbing and swearing had become audible and articulate. For the first time in his life the man heard himself hissed. Officers in front threatened and beat back, but could not stay the onset of the people. Beyond, behind, surging and shrilling, pushed the newsboys — almost a thousand strong.

The man stood perfectly still. He cringed, but he

[1] This narrative in its main incident is history.

did not cry out. He expected to be torn to pieces. He felt as if the heart of humanity leaped upon him. It occurred to him that he had no escape. It occurred to him that his subjects, in all the years of his red life, had no escape. He felt the air split with yells and curses. Instinctively, stupidly, he held fast to his dogs.

Gray-white, silent, with his shock of red hair standing straight up from his head, grimy hands clenched, teeth set, and lips drawn back from them like those of a snarling fox, Jacket had got himself to the front of the throng. The newsboys, Freckles and Blinders, pushed zealously to him and tried to support him on either side, he tottered so; but he did not notice them. His favorite reporter and the gray philanthropist in the waterproof coat said something to him, but he did not hear what it was. His old friend, Bill the fisherman, stood under the electric arc, and pushed his sleeves to the shoulders.

"If yer want anybody to punch him to a jelly, I 'm your man," he said.

The officer who used to be shore policeman turned his back and winked a little, but did not see nor hear the fisherman. Jacket noticed none of these things. To human sympathy he had gone deaf and blind. The reporter, trying to keep close to him, saw that the lad had dropped upon his hands and knees and

was crawling on all fours like a small animal with some purpose which it cannot share with the superior race.

Suddenly and silently he pounced.

The dogs were of various breeds and all sizes, and huddled, themselves terrified by the rescuing people, clinging for protection to their tormentor, the only master whom their pitiable fate had left them. But some of them struggled, and one made weak efforts to escape from the rope to which he was attached. Plaintively from somewhere in the turmoil a stealthy call arose:—

"Oh—oo—ee! Oh—oo—ee! Tammyshantee? *A*men!"

The weak dog lifted up his wounded head, and feebly barked.

Then, as we say, the lad pounced. With one swift stroke he cut the terrier free, and clasped him; but in the making of the effort fell over on the curbing with Tammyshanty in his nerveless arms.

The act was enough to fire the fury of the crowd. It rolled on and swept under the street light. The lake fisherman who was called Bill made the first stroke, and liberated a beautiful spaniel, who kissed his brown, big hand. Knife after knife flashed in the electric tremor — cry upon cry applauded until every dog in the captive group ran free. It was said afterwards that some people in the mob who had dogless

homes adopted these poor creatures, and took them to their roused, indignant hearts.

The police, who had mercifully ignored the descent upon the animals, rallied to the protection of the man. They dragged him off behind their billies — where, or to what future, no one at that time knew or cared. It has since been told of him that this practical physiologist fled the city where his scientific amusements had been so rudely interrupted by ignorant laymen, and that he escaped from the metropolis of the West to the metropolis of the East; wherein it is not the province of this story to pursue his professional career.

But Jacket and Tammyshanty lay clasped and clasping upon the sidewalk, and neither spoke. The reporter lifted them in his strong, young arms; and the gray philanthropist, dashing hot drops from eyes too old to weep at much in a world where sympathy must blunt itself to suffering for its own life's sake, said imperiously:—

"Call a carriage and a doctor, and bring them to my house."

So the boy and the dog were lifted into the carriage silently and gently, and a thousand newsboys followed the cab as if it had been a hearse. Rumor ran riot in the streets — now that the dog was dead, and the boy lived; now that the dog lived, but not the boy;

then that both were past recall to a life in which they had fared so hardly.

The morning edition of Jacket's paper ran like a freshet through the town. The pen that wrote the best "story" in the office set forth the fact — which had now become of compelling public interest — that the boy and the dog, though weak, and sore bested, would live; and that "The Wireless" had already instituted a public subscription in their behalf. A portrait of Tammyshanty, taken in his bandages, and sprawled in his little master's feeble arms, adorned an extra of that energetic daily. The Newsboys' Association cut this out and framed it, to hang upon their club-room walls.

Jacket and Tammyshanty lay on a clean bed in the old philanthropist's third-story back room, and regarded each other seriously.

"Hullo," said the boy.

"Hullo yourself," nodded the dog.

"Hully gee," said the boy.

"Hully gee," said the dog.

"Warm here, ain't it? You bet."

"You bet," agreed the dog.

"Hard, warn't it?" sobbed the boy.

"Pretty hard," blinked the dog.

"All over, ain't it?" asked the boy.

"All over," smiled the dog.

"Say your prayers, amen," said the boy.

"Amen," replied the dog.

"An' we ain't no relations, nuther," suggested the boy. Beneath the bandages on his wounded head a spark in the eye of the Irish dog fired as if he said:—

"Doncher be too sure of that!"

UNEMPLOYED

"Sir, I wish a position."

He who spoke was a man of middle age, yet under sixty. An old man would have called him still young. He was tall, and stooped a little, not, it seemed, with years, but perhaps in consequence of some one of the occupations which have a tendency to round the shoulders. His hair was grizzled rather than gray; he was clean-shaven; his lips were full and emotional, but not coarse; he had a hopeless blue eye and a well-formed nose — hardly large enough to indicate that force of character which expresses itself distinctly in this feature. He was tall and thin; his flesh, although shrunken, was soft; a physician would have called it flabby; it gave the impression of being neither nourished nor exercised. His coat was short at the sleeves, and he had no visible linen. All his clothing was brushed and sponged, but shiny and shapeless. It was a cold day, but he had no overcoat. Lacking rubbers, his feet were wet. He held his hat, a battered derby, in his hand.

He had stood in the rear of a group of thirty or forty men, all in search of work, which none of them had found; and he came up last to the desk of the manager

who held a pen suspended like a sword about to fall, before he said, with the lifeless voice of a man whose occupation it is to see his fellows suffer disappointment that he is chartered, but not empowered, to relieve:

"Well? Your name?"

"Racer, John Racer."

"Residence?"

"21 Gulf Street, city. Fourth bell on the right."

"What do you want?"

"I wish a position," repeated John Racer.

The manager's pen stabbed the cup of shot that dried it.

"What will you do?"

"Anything honest."

"What *can* you do?"

"Anything that I know how. I am a professional man."

The manager sighed patiently. His lips moved. Racer thought that they muttered the two words, "Oh Lord!"

Aloud and articulately others followed:—

"If you could dig, or build a stone wall, there might be some hope for you. My branch of this concern is the worst in the building. What do you teach?"

John Racer replied, "My calling is that of a music-master."

The dejection (apparently chronic) on the manager's face settled into acute gloom.

"I am no strolling musician, you understand," suggested the applicant. "I am not a Bohemian. I don't play in bands and small orchestras. I was a responsible man. I held a position for fifteen years in a well-known institution. It was a young lady's academy. It was a position of trust. I can give you all the references you want.

His thin hands groped in a ragged wallet for letters that were yellow with time. He held them out with a deprecating bow. The manager glanced at them, took the addresses that they offered, and pushed them back.

"All these are pretty old. Have n't you anything newer? What have you been doing all this while? Why did you leave?"

"I was taken sick," pleaded Racer. "I had a fever. I was abed two months. I got up before I was strong enough, and I fell downstairs and broke my arm. They did n't set it right, so I was laid up a year. You can see for yourself — by that time my place was filled — I supposed it would be easy to get another. I kept a few of my pupils, but they have all gone. I did not realize the pressure of modern life."

He held out his fine musical hands, palms upward, as if they were an illustration of an argument. A pale spark stirred in the manager's eyes.

"The pressure of modern life is damnation," he said unexpectedly.

"Thank you," replied the applicant, without smiling.

He stood patiently and silently by the desk. The manager shut his books. Something in the expression and attitude of the elderly applicant made him uncomfortable. It was plain to his experienced eye that the man was well on the way to a proud and respectable starvation.

"I will look up your references," he said, with some gentleness, "as our custom is. If anything turns up, I will notify you. What do you play besides the piano? Anything?"

"The flute, somewhat. But I am only an amateur there. I was trained — I was thoroughly trained to teach the art of playing upon the piano."

"I wish you had been thoroughly trained in the art of running a street-car!" exclaimed the manager, recklessly. "Or if you could build a cellar. Or shingle a roof."

"I could try," quavered Racer — "I mean, to run a car. Don't misunderstand me. I am perfectly willing to do *anything*. A gentleman is, you know."

"What do you call a gentleman?" demanded the manager. He rose to put an end to the conference. The early dark of a cloudy winter day was settling into the close room, which seemed (the fancy had occurred to Racer) to gasp with the emotion of its occupants and to writhe with the tragedy that packed those four

walls day upon day. One might call our employment offices the laboratories in which human lives are vivisected; those of the employed, or of the employer, as the case may be.

"Our office hours are over," added the manager. "I can do nothing more for you to-day. We have two thousand three hundred and fifty-six men on our books. You see, you may have to wait."

"I see," replied John Racer.

He turned away and stumbled to the door. He had eaten nothing since morning, and when the air from the street dashed into his face he found himself suddenly faint. With the instinct of a man to avoid the repetition of an old accident, he gripped the rail of the stairs and sat down hard. A door opened behind him and the manager of the agency came out. He looked disturbed.

"Don't feel well, do you?" he asked, not unkindly. "I will get you some water."

He brought a tumbler and put it to the lips of the collapsing man. "There is a sandwich left over from the luncheon my wife put up for me." The young man fumbled in his leather bag. "It's a little crushed, but it is clean. If you don't mind, sir?"

The impulse of long experience had added that last word, and the music-master instinctively yielded to it. He had begun to fling out his hands in acute protest. He expressed himself more freely with his

hands than most American men; he talked with his supple fingers as some fine dogs do with their paws.

"I thank you," he said weakly. "I did not expect any special kindness — here."

The manager was a young man who wore middle-aged glasses. One straight look escaped through them and struck the elderly applicant.

"We are a hard lot," he admitted. "We have to be. We should go to pieces if we were n't. We have got *our* living to earn. See?"

John Racer did not answer. He was devouring the sandwich. He ate it like a famished animal. He collected the crumbs and swallowed those ravenously. He looked about for a napkin, with the unconsciousness of a man who has always been accustomed to use one.

When there was nothing more to be eaten, he went slowly down the long flight of stairs and out into the street. It was growing cold, and the slush was freezing under his wet feet. He buttoned his old coat over his chest and bowed his head to the northwest wind. Something in his feeble motions and timid gait impressed the manager, who stood in the doorway for a moment and watched him. "Racer? *Racer?* What a name for that old cove! Plodder, now — Plodder — John Plodder. John Jogger. John Leftbehind. John Anything! But *Racer!* Lord!"

At 21 Gulf Street, the fourth bell on the right, the

evening had set in early. The tenement — one called it a flat by courtesy — was on the rear of the building, badly lighted, ill ventilated, and up four flights. There was no gas, but the kerosene-lamps had been lighted an hour ago. Both the occupants of the rooms were wage-earners, and their eyesight was their capital.

Mrs. Racer sat at a hoarse sewing-machine, which had fits of desperation, like a dyspeptic with a bronchial complication. She could not afford to have it repaired; it broke a good many needles, and when this happened it cried or snarled. Mrs. Racer was pretty and a matinée girl when she fell in love with her music-teacher, and left for him the home of a prosperous father, who disapproved the marriage and died a bankrupt without changing his mind. Her hands were distorted with hard work, but her profile was refined by gentle thought and feeling.

Mrs. Racer made shirt-waists for a living. She was paid seventy-two cents a dozen — six cents apiece. The sitting-room was littered, but clean. It was warmed by a small cylinder stove, on the top of which a teapot boiled eternally. When she could stop long enough, Mrs. Racer drank a cup of tea. It was as strong as her force of will, and as bitter as her lot. She had given up counting how many cups she drank in a day.

"I must be kept up, somehow," she said. Her skin

was yellow with the tannin on which she fed. Her machine was pushed near the table whereon the lamp was. She had removed the shade from the light, which revealed without remorse the ravages on her face.

On the other side of the table was an invalid-chair. The occupant was a large cripple — a woman, and still young. Her crutches hung upon the top of the chair. Her hands, not strong, were deft and delicate. Like her mother, she worked industriously. She had a cheerful expression. For six weeks she had earned a dollar and a half a week. In this circumstance she took an exquisite pride.

Her business was daintier than her mother's and quieter. She worked in tissue-paper. She dressed dolls. Incidentally she made lamp-shades and Christmas bells, doilies, decorations, but by profession she was a dressmaker for paper dolls.

She would have been attractive or possibly handsome if she had been well. She sat in a billow of bright colors; her lap, like the table and the floor, blazed with brilliant flimsiness. She was snipping a silver sash for a doll with a bronze skirt and a Nile-green shirt-waist. It was to be noted that she did not trick her toys discordantly. She had a sense of color, it came out in tissue-paper, nor did she scorn (no artist does) the available material. As her father had loved and mastered musical sound, the spirit of

the daughter yearned for beautiful tints. To an extent not guessed by the uninitiated, crêpe paper offered these. In them she rejoiced, and of them she wrought cheerfully.

Everything about the young woman was cheerful, except her name; this was a twice-told corruption. Sarah, her mother, had called the child Sadie; but the baby elected to name herself Little Sad, and Little Sad she had remained — a big, happy cripple, patient from the beginning of her denied life. She sat smiling in a wave of pearl grays, shading to dove and steel, and foaming into pale rose. She handled the delicate paper as freely as if it had been lace; she never tore it.

"There!" cried Mrs. Racer. The old sewing-machine snarled and snapped. Sad laid down her paper doll.

"Another needle, mummy?"

"Two to-day," sighed Mrs. Racer. "I believe I 'll stop and breathe on this one. Whom are you dressing now, Little Sad?"

"A lady," replied the paper-dress maker. She held up the painted cardboard body of a middle-aged doll with gray hair. "Princess, and a dinner dress," said Sad; "three shades of gray let in somewhere, and rose on the corsage. She will be quiet; quiet like a moonbeam from top to toe."

"Who was that you dressed yesterday?" asked the

mother, indulgently. While she talked she reset her needle and replaced the sleeve of a shirt-waist with a yellow stripe. "Who was the one with the red feather on the picture-hat?"

"Oh, she was an actress," replied Sad. "She sings in ballet. But the lady, mummy — the lady stays at home. She has a lovely home!" added Sad, joyously. "She entertains educated people. In fact, I 'm not perfectly sure she is n't Cousin Guy's wife."

"What do you know about Cousin Guy, Sad? We have n't any of us seen him this dozen years."

"Oh, I hear Father talk," said Sad. She was crimping a tiny ruffle of rose tissue for the bodice of the lady in silver gray. The ruffle was so small that only exquisite fingers could have handled it.

"I know," replied the mother, patiently. "He has those times. He thinks of everything we can't have, and of everybody who has forgotten us. Your father is a dreamer, Sad. He always was."

"That 's the music in him," answered Sad. She spoke in a low, cooing voice. Her father used to say that she sounded like a pigeon on a roof.

"It 's time he got home," said Mrs. Racer, anxiously. "You don't hear him, do you? I could n't hear the last trumpet, working. Sometimes I do wish we could afford one of those new machines. They don't make half the racket."

"Oh, I shall hear him," returned Sad, in her

comfortable way. "I always hear him six steps down from the top of the last flight. Don't slander your machine, mummy. It 's all you 've got. Sewing-machines can't have cultivated voices; they 're not born ladies."

"Nor born poultry-yards, either, Sad. When this one does n't crow it cackles."

"Or quacks," suggested Sad, laughing. "When it has made up its mind to chew off a needle it barks. Mummy dear, he is coming."

The sewing-machine was now screaming down the seam. The woman, with her foot on the treadle, could hear nothing. The cripple laid down her tissue-paper daintily, slipped her crutches under her arms, and got to the door.

John Racer entered silently. He stooped more than usual, and his lips were shut together hard. His hopeless eyes included everything in the room at a glance. This ran from the mother to the daughter, and back again with an expression that was less tender than defiant. He regarded the two wage-earners with a fathomless envy. It was as if a transparent sliding-door rolled between himself and them. He experienced the bitter exclusion of a man who is supported by the women of his household. If he had shirked or dawdled, he would not have been capable of feeling this. He had tried, like a man, to do a man's work. The merciless modern world had none to offer

him. No woman can understand the workings of a man's mind and heart in such a maladjustment of life; and his women did not.

They thought they did, of course. They were conscious of "keeping up" for his sake. They never nagged; they asked few questions; they were conscientiously kind. Racer dimly suspected that it was by no means a circumstance to count upon that a man should be cherished by two feminine creatures who never lost their tempers. Sometimes he wished they would. If they snapped at him occasionally, or even reproached, he had a curious feeling that it would reduce his sense of obligation. In fact, his was the uncertain temper; his wife and daughter expected a given amount of irritability from him, and assumed towards it the half-indulgent, half-superior patience that women at their best offer to the weaknesses of men.

On the evening of which we tell, John Racer came home in beaten reticence. Every day that winter he had set forth upon his solitary share in the mortal struggle for existence, and every night he had returned defeated. At first his wife used to ask him kind, foolish questions, as, "John, what luck to-day?" or, "Dear, is there any news?" She had long ceased to make any inquiries; his daughter never had. When he chose, he spoke, and to-night he did not choose. Sad, leaning on her crutches, put both her delicate

TIRED, FATHER?

hands upon his arm. She was so tall that her smiling face came almost upon a level with his own.

"Tired, Father?" When she spoke, she patted his arm. This was all she said. He looked at her and dropped heavily into a chair before the stove.

The sewing-machine screamed on to the end of the seam, and stopped crossly. It seemed to Racer that it cawed like a crow and jeered at him. Even the senseless piece of machinery was his superior, for it could earn money. His wife stepped out of a thicket of shirt-waists, scrutinized without seeming to see him, and hurried to his side. There she began to brood over him. She insisted upon the first rights of a wife, and seldom relinquished them, even to her daughter. Sad might divert and amuse and cheer her father, but his wife should comfort him.

"You are cold," she said. "It was such a mistake to sell that overcoat. You are chilled through. Why, John, John! Your feet are wet. They are sopping. You must change them right away."

She knelt and pulled off his old drenched shoes. She dragged away his stockings, and rubbed his feet with her small, roughened hands. Although he protested he let her do it; he knew that it made her happy.

She brought him dry stockings, and apologized because they had holes in them. "I have n't had time to mend them yet. I 'll get around to it pretty soon. Here 's a cup of tea, John. It 's hot and strong. It

may just save you a cold. I will get supper right away. We have got baked potatoes. I saved you a little piece of bacon. Did you have any luncheon to-day?"

"Yes, yes," said Racer, eagerly; "an excellent luncheon." He quivered with delight at being able to say so without lying. For two months he had gone without luncheons, for which he could not pay, and for which he was determined that Sarah should not. This she did not know; he meant that she never should. But Sarah was a wife and loved; therefore she suspected. She perceived in her husband the growing morbidness of idleness and penury. It had even occurred to her that he was depriving himself with deliberate purpose of such food as she could offer him at their scanty meals. He claimed to have lost his appetite; she had begun by believing him; of late she did not know what to believe. But she had never said so. She spared him all she could.

Sad cleared away her litter of colored papers from the table, and knocked about softly on her crutches to help her mother serve their supply of potatoes and salt — and tea. It was a cheap green tea. Mrs. Racer drank it like a drunkard. She gave her husband the slice of bacon which she had jealously kept for him. The three sat at their crude meal with the table manners of a class as foreign as their grammar was to their squalid conditions. Sad talked lightly — she always did — making merry of their lot. Some-

times her father tired of the unremitting cheerfulness, for lack of which he would have sunk into abject melancholy. Once he had said to her:—

"Sad! This has ceased to be ridiculous. It is dreadful."

But Sad laughed.

The music-master had no piano; he had sold his two years ago; his flute alone was left him; it lay on the mantel (which Sad had draped in soft moss-green paper), and regarded him with the patience of the helpless and neglected. After supper, which he had eaten without speaking, Sad did a bold thing. She thudded over on her crutches and brought the flute to him.

"Give us a little music, Father, won't you? Give us 'Adelaide.'"

But John Racer pushed the flute away. He got to his feet and flung his arms above his head.

"Damn music!" he said.

Such a shocked silence answered him that it startled the man. He stood and stared at his wife and daughter for a moment; at Sarah's yellow cheeks and Sad's big pale face; then his uplifted arms fell slowly and his head sank upon his breast. As if he had cursed his Creator, the musician stood trembling and repentant.

It may have been penitence for this sin that moved him several weeks thereafter to do the thing he did

with his flute. But the incident needs a prefatory word.

The winter was a cold one and fuel was high. The kitchen stove and the cylinder in the working-room gaped greedily for unprecedented fodder. The rent was due. After the holidays there was a decline in the paper-doll market, and the cripple's income visibly decreased. Sarah Racer was disabled by one of the influenzas obstinately cherished by the American populace under the pseudonym of grippe. Orders for shirt-waists fell off, and long silences punctuated the cross chatter of the sewing-machine.

When every other form of economy is exhausted, one is left. The human body can refuse the food that nourishes it, and scorn the consequences. How many suicides have eluded life by this unsuspected road no medical examiner has reported to us or ever will. The Racers began to go hungry, and then cold. The women exchanged grave glances; they had ceased to discuss their plight with each other; they had long ago ceased to discuss it with the music-master; it had, somehow, abruptly (as such troubles do) struck down below the reach of words. For the first time in her life, Sad's temperamental cheerfulness deserted her. She did not tell funny stories to her father when he came home with his beaten — it had become a hunted — look. The untimely is the unseemly optimism, like a laugh at a grave. Not all optimists per-

ceive this, but Sad did. She made lamp-shades in silence.

For the first time in their history, the family clung together and dragged each other into the pit that is called despair; Sad had planted her crippled feet on the edge of the precipice, and withstood this disaster as long as she could. In all households there is the lifter, and there are the leaners; so, in most there is the light-bearer, and there are gloom-bringers. When the humorous and the luminous qualities in Sad gave way, everything tumbled and crumbled with her.

With this rapid descent of their already fallen fortunes, certain curious changes might have been noticed in the home of John Racer. He himself grew rougher of speech and manner; sometimes he talked the patois of the street; his grammar halted now and then. The ladies became careless of their dress; the rooms were not as clean as they used to be; the habits of tenement life subtly encroached upon the household of the starving gentleman. It was as if privation, having worked its will upon their bodies, had turned upon their delicate instincts. Below the deeps of hunger and cold and rags there is a deeper depth, and into this the music-master's family had begun to slide. The inherited and acquired refinement of their natures was in danger; but the subtlest of their perils was that they did not know it.

One sharp morning the musician slyly slid his flute

under his coat when he set forth on his daily, and denied demand for the right to exist. With shuffling steps, with hanging head, he crawled to the business section of the town, sought the densest crowd he saw, and, standing with his back against a big plate-glass window, suddenly dragged out his flute and put it to his blue lips. The day was very cold, and his fingers shook. His heart beat with long, thumping strokes. He had eaten little breakfast. The flute fell from his hands, and he picked it up from the snow, and, with a gasp, began to play "Adelaide."

After a moment, the acute misery of his position subsided a little, and he was able to see that people were listening to him. Many stopped, some smiled, some held out hands. Suddenly he felt money in his palm — a dime, another, two, a quarter, some nickels. The hot color raced across his face. From sheer shame he lifted the flute again to his lips and played on wildly; thus occupying both his hands, that they need not betray his soul. With a scorching humiliation he perceived the nature of the thing that he had done.

"Adelaide! Adelaide!" sang the flute.

"I am a beggar! I am a beggar!" said the gentleman.

John Racer, as we have said, was a dreamer. He knew much music, but little law. It had never occurred to him that he could be breaking any by his

humiliating act. When a policeman's hand gripped him by the wasted shoulder he looked up like a child.

"Where is your license?" thundered the officer.

"Why," said the music-master, trembling with terror, "I did not know that I had to obtain any."

"Oh, come off!" cried the guardian of public morals; "that 's too thin."

His big hand slipped from the old man's shoulder to his wrist.

"Why, Professor Racer!" cried a voice from the crowd. Some one stepped up and whispered a few words to the officer, who reluctantly released his hold on the musician.

"Oh, well," he said, "if you 'll be answerable for him. But he 's old enough to know better. Don't let it happen again."

Pale and panting, the bewildered music-teacher felt a kindly hand drawn through his arm, and found himself led quickly and quietly out of the now fast-thickening crowd. His rescuer was a middle-aged person, with the head and features of an educated man and the dress of a prosperous clerk or upper employee.

"What! Don't remember me? I taught history at the academy. We went to faculty meeting together for two years."

The speaker did not offer his name, and it had gone clean out of Racer's memory; but he remembered the voice; by means of this he identified the face, and his

heart yearned towards his old colleague as one yearns to a neighbor, never sought at home, whom one meets at a distance from it upon a journey.

Under a few warm-hearted questions, the shield of Racer's reserve lowered, and he yielded the personal history of five bleak years.

"Oh, I know!" cried the other. "*Don't* I know? I have been through it myself. Every man's hand is at the other man's throat now. You earn a living at the bayonet's point. Get pushed a foot out of the ranks, and they rush right over you like Waterloo. *I* gave up trying to live the intellectual life two years ago. Somehow, I got left and I could n't catch up. There are too many of us, Racer, and New England is the very devil. Any bricklayer has a better chance. — What? Yes; took the first thing I could get — the first honest thing, I mean. I'm not a gentleman and a scholar, Professor Racer, any more. I am a florist's assistant. I decorate rich people's houses. My children have enough to eat, and my wife is warmly dressed."

The two derelicts of professional life looked at each other with the deep instincts of class allegiance.

"The trouble with you is," suggested the teacher of history, "you have struck too high. Been bothering the teachers' agencies, have n't you?"

The music-master nodded bitterly.

"Come down!" said the teacher. "Come down! Try the employment offices — something manual. I

will give you some addresses. There 's one I got my situation from. You are n't very young, that 's a fact," he added, ruefully. "Can you lift?"

"I can try," said John Racer.

"We are short a hand to-day," suggested the florist's decorator, "and I have got a reception on at the West End. Jump into my team and I will take you over. It will be worth seventy-five cents. You have n't got an overcoat. Whew! That 's too bad."

"I am quite warm," protested the music-master, joyfully. He hugged his shivering shoulders as they rode.

Now, when he went with his friend into the rich man's house he saw upon the door-plate the name of his wife's relative, he who was known in the family as Cousin Guy — Guy Northrup. Racer was so disturbed by this that he would have turned and fled, but the sturdier will of his old colleague pushed him on.

The master of the house was not within it, but the mistress was. She came in personally to superintend the decorations of her drawing-room, and John Racer looked at her furtively while he carried potted plants and tubs of palms. The lady was dressed in shades of gray, like that paper doll of Sad's. She was "quiet as moonlight," as Sad had said, from head to foot. She had a warm smile, and her voice was like the prelude

to "Adelaide." A fine piano stood open at the end of the long drawing-room. A wild impulse to reveal himself seized upon the old musician. He could hardly keep his hands from the keys. The ease of the beautiful house crept upon his nerves; its familiar luxury stung the tears to his hollow eyes — he was physically so weak. In such homes he had taught half his life; in such he had been entertained — the artist honored with his art.

He asked to be allowed to decorate the piano, and he laid a low basket of violets upon it reverently. The familiar Beethoven hung above the piano — Mozart and the others beyond; there was a bust of Chopin in the corner. The old musician lifted his eyes to the masters.

"Madam," he observed, holding out a spray of ivy, "shall I crown Chopin?"

"Be a little careful," said the decorator, in the tone with which he used to reprimand his history class. "You will give yourself away."

Racer did not speak again. At noon he hurried home like a boy with his seventy-five cents. But the money that the flute had brought him had dropped from a hole in his vest pocket between the lining and the cloth. He let it stay there. He felt ashamed to touch it; he did not tell his wife that he had dishonored "Adelaide" by begging in the street.

. . . . . .

"Sir," said John Racer, "I want a situation."

At the desk of an employment office of the lower grades the music-master stood patiently. He was pushed from behind by two farm-hands; a groom elbowed him; a motorman and a coachman had forged ahead of him. In that mass of brawn and bluster he looked feeble, inadequate, and older than he was. His voice had a strange, thin note, like that of a being speaking through an electric wire from a star.

"What can *you* do?" demanded the man at the desk. He made, to do him justice, a good-humored effort to subdue the contempt that he felt. "Can you dig? Plough? Mow?"

"I never have," replied Racer, humbly; "but I could learn, I think."

"Can you milk a dozen cows night and morning?"

The music-master was silent.

"Can you drive a span?"

"Oh, yes. I have often done that."

"Whose were they? Your own?"

"No," replied John Racer, with his childlike manner; "I owned but one horse."

"Have you a coachman's reference?"

The musician did not reply.

"Or a butler's? You might do as a butler now. You have a pretty respectable look."

"I have no reference — as a butler — no."

"Could you drive a furniture-van? Have to handle

heavy furniture. We have an order for an express-man's helper. Can you lift trunks? I see there 's one or two ice companies want hands. That 's up at 3 A. M. and coolin' off pretty quick in ice-houses hot weather. Could you carry fifty pounds to the pick, think? Hey! What? Look here! Boys, what ails the old fellar? Here. Let *me* come. Great Scott! The poor devil! — Starved, by Moses!"

The coachman and the farm-hands stepped up; the motorman shook his head and said, "Gee!"

A teamster lifted the musician.

"Look at them fingers!" he whispered to a stone-mason; "I could snap 'em like macaroni!"

When John Racer tried to get himself up from the floor by his despised and rejected artistic hands, a good-natured furnaceman was spilling water over him out of a tin cup.

"Here," said the furnaceman, "lemme boost yer!"

John Racer thanked the furnaceman with elaborate courtesy, but said that he was quite able to walk alone. This he did, staggering pathetically away. He never entered an employment office again.

"It must be something in the air," he said to his wife.

A philosopher was the poet who sang, —

> "These hard, well-meaning hands we thrust
> Among the heart-strings of a friend."

The florists' decorator had held out a hurried hand to the music-master, and gone his ways with a pleasant sense of having done an easy kindness, and with a comfortable purpose to follow it up by others when he saw the chance. The cost of his inconsequent good humor was definite and heavy to his old colleague; but this the teacher of history never knew, nor would he understand if he were told the subtle relation of that morning's tragedy to John Racer's life. The links were too fine for him.

It is never easy to distinguish the precise origin of a great temptation. One may recall the point back of which one can be sure that it did not exist; but the moment when it began to be is as hard to define as the moment when a fog forms upon a clear coast. Of no human besetment is this so true as of the temptation to cease from the trouble of living. Racer could not have said whether he had or had not dallied with this ghastly siren before the day when he crowned the bust of Chopin with ivy in the home of the relative of Sarah, his wife. But he could not have denied that since that hour his brooding, melancholy soul had been obsessed by invisible forces, most of them sinister, all of them strong. Although an imaginative man. he could not have conceived of their power until he had come beneath it. When he had yielded by the width of a tolerant thought, he seemed suddenly to

have yielded half his fighting quality. This thought, nebulous at first, then clear, and soon distinct, formed about the gray-clad figure of the lady who had lifted beautiful startled eyes to her decorator's assistant when he said, "Shall I crown the Chopin?" They were kind. Oh, yes, her eyes were kind. They had the woman in them; they were capable of pity; they might weep if she were touched; they would recognize gentle nature when they met it. Sarah, too, was a lady. She would be sorry for Sarah. When he was gone — if he were out of Sarah's life for once and for always — she would compassionate Sarah. And Sad — a cripple! That would appeal to the gray lady. She could not stand off in her beautiful gown and see Sad suffer. In a word, Racer had brought himself to the point of believing that the relative of his wife would provide for the family if its unfortunate head were removed. Once he would have set aside this delusion healthily and intelligently. Ten years ago it could not have got the better of him. He had been so long exiled from his own world; he had been so long a poor man, forgotten, neglected, cold, ragged, starved, that he had lost the natural focus of his class, and acquired that of the poor towards the rich. He had undergone the color-blindness of penury. He saw yellow as a murderer sees red. He came to exaggerate the distant claim of kin upon those luxurious people. He dwelt upon it until it assumed preposterous proportions. He saw

his wife in a soft gown, all shades of gray like the paper dolls. He saw Sad, smiling and idle, in an easy chair beside the bust of Chopin. He had come to the pass of assuming that his family would be adopted bodily into that home of ease and gentle feeling.

Now this peril of the soul he could not share with his wife. Most of the temptations of his life he had. Years ago, when he had come to depend too much on his madeira at dinner, she had persuaded it off the table. Once, when he was a little *épris* with a pretty pupil, he had told his wife about it, as a matter of course. They talked it over together, and Sarah's good sense and good nature had kept him from making a fool of himself. But *this* — no, from this he must shield Sarah as he had shielded her from a draught or a too bright light in their bridal days. He could fling himself off the spinning world into the mysteries of space and leave her. But he would shelter her from the agony of knowing that he meant to do it. As he toyed with this idea it grew like some creature of mythology that assumes unnatural metamorphoses.

At first it had been a little thing with which he played — like a kitten or some domestic pet. Now it was a monster and played with him. Whichever way he looked he saw the temptress — death.

That he should ultimately yield to her he had no longer any doubt. But the method and the time of his

surrender still remained undecided in his mind. As long as this was so he was still comparatively safe, although he did not know it. But the serious aspect of his situation was that he did not tell. Intelligent persons talk suicide sometimes, but if they do, they seldom commit it.

When a man locks his purpose in his heart, and barricades the door, and stations patrols of watchful, cheerful words or sombre reticence to keep off human approach and human suspicion — then save him if you can. Whether the mind of a suicide is always an alienated mind is not a question for this chronicle to decide or discuss. As for John Racer, he was not insane. His melancholy had not yet broken the hinge of his intellect. He knew perfectly what he was about, and why. It was not at all clear to him that he had not the right to take the life imposed upon him by a fate which now forbade him the power to sustain it. If he reasoned fallaciously, remember that he was not a philosopher, but a musician. He was accustomed to put his emotions to the front. Beethoven, Mozart, and Chopin had not taught him logic. Nor had he been what is called a religious man; he had only loved his wife. What he purposed to do he should do for Sarah's sake. Love was his syllogism, but there was a false term in it, and his conclusion betrayed him.

He began to stroll into drug-stores and put ques-

tions about poisons. He began to haunt the bridges spanning the river that curved around the city. One day his fingers went down into the hole in his vest pocket and fumbled for the change that his flute had begged for him when it sang "Adelaide." He thought of the thirty pieces of silver for which Judas had betrayed his Lord. He took the money out and counted it slowly. There were eighty-five cents. He took this to a pawn-shop and bought a second-hand pistol, old and rusty. This he carried home and hid in his shaving-stand, which had a drawer that locked. It was almost the only piece of furniture that he had saved from his comfortable past. He laid the pistol beside the razor and a bottle of laudanum that had been there for some weeks, put the key in his pocket, fled the house, and went back to the river.

It came on to be early spring, when, if ever, the starving are fed. Masses of men with bitter eyes and powerful muscles thronged out into the country to wrench a living from their mother earth. It occurred to John Racer to do the same. He dug holes to plant trees upon a gentleman's lawn for half a day. He was kindly dismissed at noon upon the ground that they needed a stronger man, and he did not try again.

All this while (having abandoned the employment offices) he ravaged the advertisements; mechanically, dutifully, not because he had hope, even what a great misanthrope called "desperate," as distinct from

"common hoping hope," but because of a crude, peremptory thing within him that he neither understood nor respected — the instinct to live. Now that he had determined to die, he scorned this savage impulse, while yet he parried with it, God knew why.

From a flaring red and yellow Sunday paper he cut out a couple of lines which set forth the demand of a family for a gentleman to go to the seashore and tutor two boys, very little boys, and to teach them the rudiments of music. It would not be easy to say why John Racer staked his life, or even what one might call his soul, upon this venture; but he did. Beyond it, he was determined not to make another. If he got the place he would live, at least till fall; perhaps even he would take the chance as a sign (he did not know of what) and go on living. If he failed to get it, his mind was made. He would tolerate the injustice of existence no more. He would rebel and riot against it. Yes, and he would take the consequences, be they what they might. Once he muttered, "I will not be supported by women any longer."

He was so fortunate as to secure a reply from the advertiser upon whose whim he had flung this awful toss, and the evening before the day when he should keep his appointment he locked himself into his little, hot bedroom and wrote for a while. He heard the cackle of the sewing-machine in the working-room, and in the pauses his wife's voice — not so modulated

as it was once. Then Sad spoke, not merrily, as she used to do; she had caught phrases that she heard from their neighbors, the women in the tenements above and below them. By a curious freak of his excited mind he thought of some of the unpleasant details in their sordid lot: how they had parted with the last piece of Sarah's wedding silver, and ate anyhow, with anything; and that it was some time since their napkins gave out, darned to the last thread. Once he had just saved himself from putting the edge of the table-cloth to his lips at supper. It was oilcloth, and veined to imitate marble.

"It is for their sakes," he said. "We are sinking into the bottomless pit. We have become part of the great submerged. It is for their sakes."

He wrote two letters, read and reread them, but changed nothing in them; sealed, addressed, and put them in his shaving-stand, which he did not lock. Thus they ran:

"Mr. Guy Northrup:

"My dear Cousin,— My poor wife will tell you the history which has driven me to that which I have decided to do. Please tell Mrs. Northrup that I put the ivy on the Chopin when I came with the florist's decorator that day. Do me the credit, if you can, to remember that I have never made myself known to annoy you, or to appeal to your sympathy. I believe

poor relatives sometimes do. Sir, I have tried in every way I can think of to earn a living. I cannot do it. The ladies of my family — my poor wife, my crippled daughter — have supported me as long as I can bear it. When I am out of their way, for the love of God and pity on a desperate man, will you look to it, somehow, that they do not starve or freeze? We have been pretty near it. If there is any knowledge in the place to which I am going (I don't know whether there is) I shall thank you, sir.

I am, yours truly,

JOHN RACER."

The other letter was no longer, and was blurred from beginning to end with splashing tears: —

"SARAH, — We 've been happy together in spite of all. We have loved each other a good while and a good deal. What I mind most is the way you 'll look when they bring me home. But it is the only thing to be done. I have tried everything else. Your cousin Guy will look after you and Sad — his wife will, if he does n't. I hope you won't take it very hard, Sarah. I wish I could make you see it as I do. Sometimes I am afraid you won't.

"Bury my flute with me, and if there were anybody that could sing 'Adelaide' I should like that. But I don't suppose there will be. How long was it I

called you Adelaide? It seemed I never could get used to Sarah. You were such a delicate, poetic creature — half music, half fire. All our lives together you have been all love. I wish I could make you believe that it is love that makes me do this deed.

"Tell Sad —"

But what he would have told Sad was blotted past deciphering.

He went in and spent the rest of the evening with his wife and daughter. They were not working, and the family sat in the dark to save kerosene. They chatted quietly, and Sarah Racer remembered afterwards that John had talked more than usual, and more cheerfully.

In the night she waked once or twice, and thought that he was not asleep, and once she found him holding her hand as he lay straight and still at her side.

In the morning he ate no breakfast, but this was not unusual, and he did not tell them where he was going, but that often happened. He did say: —

"I may be late to-night. Don't worry if I am."

He kissed them both good-by, and then he came back and kissed his wife a second time. She went to the top of the stairs and watched him going down the

upper flight; he clung to the banister and measured his steps carefully. She thought him paler than usual, or feebler. She said to Sad: —

"Your father is getting to be an old man."

It was four o'clock that afternoon when John Racer came to the river. Why to the river, he could not have told, because he had no intention, remote or near, of drowning. Perhaps he wished to feel that he could if the other failed. The rusty pistol was in his breast-pocket, and he felt of it as if it had been a love-letter or money, or even a Bible, such as religious persons carried. It occurred to him once that he had never been religious, and to wonder if it would have made any difference if he had been with this which he purposed to do. His determination was quite fixed. He had passed all the doubtful stages. He had gone by the border-land. He had come to the country of no retreat. His mind was perfectly clear and calm. He had risked his last throw. He could not even teach the rudiments of music to very little boys. Whatever dying was, he was convinced that it would be easier than living; and this is a dangerous conviction for any man to reach.

The bridge was not crowded — it was an hour too early for that — and he had chosen a place at its farther end, as far as possible (he would have said) from Sarah. He found it difficult to

forget — he wished he could — that Sarah might take this hard.

He was leaning over the rail of the bridge; it appeared that he was watching the water, but in fact he was accustoming himself to the feel of the trigger on the pistol, which he had covered from observation by his coat. While he was standing so, at halt between life and death, and craving death with the passion of failure and age, he was disturbed by the sobbing of a child, and looking up he saw a little crippled girl. He thrust the pistol into his breast pocket.

"There 's plenty of time," he thought. "It will stay there."

With the manner and tone which could have belonged only to the father of a crippled child, he put his arm about the little thing and besought her to tell him the nature of her trouble. It seemed she had lost one crutch; it had fallen into the river, she thought. She stood crying and pointed down with a dirty little finger.

"Why, no," he said, cheerfully. "It is right on the rocks, not very far down. I can get it for you easily."

This he did, clambering down like a young, strong man, and brought back the crutch to the child, who gave him a small, twisted smile and hobbled away. He stood and watched her, smiling too.

"I must tell Sad that," he thought. Then he remembered that he should never tell Sad anything again.

He went back upon the bridge, walking slowly. Four men were coming from the city, straggling one after the other.

"I must wait till they have gone," he thought. Two passed, and a third; the fourth was well behind. John Racer resumed his station at the spot which he had left to help the crippled child. His hand crept stealthily to his breast pocket; he pulled his hat violently over his eyes. The fourth and last man came up, passed, turned, and stopped. A hand touched the musician's shoulder.

"Hello, John Jogger!" cried the fourth man.

In the tenement that one called a flat by courtesy it was very hot. Work went heavily, and the sewing-machine, which seemed to mind the weather, like other people, turned shrewish, snarled, and bit off a needle.

"There!" said Mrs. Racer; "the third to-day. And I believe I have n't got another to my name."

"Then you can rest and enjoy yourself, mummy," suggested Sad.

"Oh, yes; I can rest — and enjoy — my-self," repeated Sarah Racer, bitterly.

She pushed her chair away from the machine and

began to fold and pile up the shirt-waists that billowed about her. Sad put back the straggling wet hair from her own damp face and leaned back in her cushioned chair; her large eyes brooded as if she had been the mother and Sarah Racer had been the child.

"Don't begin yet," she said abruptly. "It really is n't time. He is often later than this, you know — much later, mummy."

"It 's the look he had," replied Mrs. Racer. "But it is early to worry, I 'll own to that. What are you dressing to-day, Sad?"

Sad hesitated, and held up her paper doll in silence. The cripple sat in a mass of mournful colors, black and white; and the doll in her hands was a paper widow in a long black veil. Sad tied a little white tissue bow beneath the widow's chin, and laid her away in a pasteboard box.

"I hate it! I hate it!" she cried suddenly. "To-morrow I 'll have a bride and six bridesmaids."

"Sad," said Mrs. Racer, "there 's no use pretending any longer. Your father ought to have been here half an hour ago."

She got up and drained a cup of bitter tea, cold, and poisoned by the tin pot in which it had stood all day. Then she began to pace the hot, small room, passing in and out of the bedroom as she flung herself to and fro, pulling on her nerves as a dog pulls on a leash.

"I did n't like his looks to-day," she repeated.

Now Sad had liked them even less, but she had not said so. She sat with her large head on one side, listening acutely. She took her crutches from the top of the chair and held them ready for she knew not what. She tried to say something, but only succeeded in making that cooing, comforting noise which her father said was like pigeons on a roof. The two women endured the inquisition of anxiety which men inflict because they are men, and never, for the same reason, understand.

Then Sad heard a cry — low at first, but rising till it cleft her heart. From out of the bedroom Mrs. Racer dashed; her face, shriveled beneath its yellow skin, was of a piteous color; in her small, rough hands she held out two shaking letters.

All disheveled as she was, in her cotton wrapper, open at the throat, Sarah Racer would have plunged into the street. But the cripple held her back.

"Not without me, mummy! Not without me!" Sad, who had not been down the stairs since she had been lifted up them more than a year before, put her crutches under her arms and thudded to the top flight, sat herself down and pushed from step to step, as persons on crutches can. As she did so she held her mother's skirt and clung to it, for she was afraid that the woman would fling herself headlong. So

the little procession of two came down four flights of stairs and panted into the street. There they stood, bewildered, knowing no more than the pigeons on the roofs above them what to do. But Sad kept her head, and held her mother by the cotton wrapper.

"Keep a *little* quiet, mummy! Don't let *everybody* know."

They stumbled along the sidewalk, staring everywhere, as if that would find or help him, afraid to tell their dreadful news, afraid not to tell it, and clinging together as women do in the emergencies that have gone beyond their wits.

Then, running rapidly towards them they saw a radiant man. He was an aging man, but his years had fallen from him like melted snow. He was gaunt and bent and ragged; but he held his head like a boy. He was feeble and bald, and in his excitement he had lost his hat and ran bareheaded; but the fire of youth flared in his eyes, and his voice was as the voice of those who have drunk the wine of joy. Gesticulating with his voluble fingers, he held out his arms, and his wife lurched into them. The cripple, tottering, supported only by her crutches, laughed. Proud, ecstatic, with the triumph of one who, being compelled by the laws of God and man to exist, has found the way to do so, John Racer cried aloud: —

"*I've got a job!*"

THE SACRED FIRE

THE room was high and dimly lighted, its ceiling traversed with oaken beams. In the shadow that seemed to rise from below, like hot air, these gave the effect of arms extended; whether in benediction or malediction, who but the occupant should say?

The walls, such portions of them as showed between the tall bookcases, were papered in dull gold. The bookcases were full and in ceremonious order; éditions de luxe were many, and all the books were expensively bound; few were at all worn, and a binding battered by love was not to be seen.

The room, in fact, was a library in which nobody read — a rich man's library, selected by a bookseller, or some literary friend; ordered as one chooses his horses, his wines, his upholstery, or his wife, to complete an establishment.

Jackson Grenfell's wife sat by the reading-lamp with the yellow porcelain shade (a dash of butterflies and golden-glow blew across it), and, though one had been a stranger in the room, it would have seemed somehow the unexpected thing that Allyria Grenfell should have an open book — not a novel — in her hand. Strictly speaking, for the last year it could not have

been said that nobody read in the library. Allyria had read. This is to say, she had been trying to, or learning to, taught by her friendship for a reading man. Enchained as he was by her charm, it must be confessed that he had been perplexed, at times even chilled, by her ignorance, and he had set about the pleasant task of leading her through the gardens of literature with that mingled sense of superiority and delight natural to a man who is accustomed to feminine admiration, and who has failed to experience the power of a woman stronger than himself.

In a word, Allyria read because Cecil Murray had asked her to, and Murray had asked her to because he could not help it. He felt the waste in her rich nature as an affront; it had come to take on the character of a personal loss to him. She was no more undeveloped than other women of her type. Her luxurious instincts had been pampered to surfeit, and her brain starved to famine; her soul — but Murray did not go so far as that; in the matter of souls he was as uninstructed as she, perhaps, although he did not know it, more so. He had the self-satisfaction of a dilettante whose literary taste may supplant his conscience without his suspecting it. At all events, he had led and she had read, and both had learned; lessons not in their calculation, and amassing upon them an education yet to be reckoned with.

She had called it friendship, as good women do;

and what he called it she did not ask. In spite of the fatal history of man and woman, friendship exists; an emotion noble if not safe; and Allyria had sat in the old perilous seat and thought herself secure, because it had not occurred to her that she could possibly be otherwise.

But her reading, like her experience, had followed the line of least resistance. Murray had begun, when he was a dreamy, self-indulgent lad at college, to read the artistic, tainted novels, making his own misguided selection, and this habit he had never dropped. It was like that of any other inebriation; his dram had long since ceased to please him, but he drank on. He had lent a few French and Russian classics to Mrs. Grenfell, but she did not care for them. He had read the dangerous fiction; but she had chosen the dangerous poetry; the combination had its liabilities, like those of sulphur and fire.

On this evening of which we tell, Allyria had not been reading attentively; her mind and her body were equally restless. She closed her book suddenly — it was one of the modern decadents — and pushed it as far from her as she could across the table, replacing it by another for which she groped with brown, September hands upon the mantel. A low fire had been started in the grate, but, being a fire, and unfed, was dying slowly. She stood for a moment in the faint cannel flicker, urging the pages through her

fingers. When she had found the poem she did not read it, but glanced at it, wincing. She seemed to cower before it, and with a gesture more of fear than of impatience, laid the book open face down below the reading-lamp. She did not resume her seat, but stood with her eyes upon the failing fire.

She was not in dinner dress, as the servants had observed, but wore a street gown of dark cloth. The early autumn night was warm, and she had pushed off the jacket. Her face rose from her cream lace waist as if both had been parts of the same piece of delicate embroidery. Her skin was as soft as that of a well woman can be, and her coloring was fair and fine. But her eyes and hair were tropical.

She had dined early and lightly, and it was still scarcely seven by the clock upon the mantel. It seemed to Mrs. Grenfell that the clock watched her and followed her about the room, as the eyes of a good portrait follow the observer. She grew uncomfortable before the clock, and presently it occurred to her that it was pointing at her with its fingers. This idea possessed her so that she turned her back upon the clock resentfully and left the room. The house was quite still, and the upper story deserted. She met no one, and she wandered from doorway to doorway with something of the sense of freedom which she had when she let all the servants off upon a half-holiday.

"It is only then," she once told her husband, "that I feel as if we owned our own house."

"Oh, come now!" Jackson Grenfell had said, staring, "there isn't a mortgage on it."

She was quite used to Jackson's not understanding; he was not apt to. Allyria would have loved her home if she had been happy in it; she was naturally a homing woman. Now she looked about the house compassionately, as if it were something that could feel and suffer, and if it were deserted would know it. With more of purpose than of accident in her motions she slid from room to room, lingering chiefly in three — her own, a reverie in pearl and rose, too delicate to be sumptuous, but too tender to be cold; her husband's, where her bridal portrait still hung above the empty bed, flanked by riding-whips and antlers, champion golf cups, and photographs of racing yachts; and then the child's. This last was locked. She had always kept the key herself since the baby died. She used to go in every morning and sun and air the empty nursery, but for a long time she had neglected to do so; perhaps she had purposed not to do so. The place was damp and cold. She shrank from it at first, as if she had opened a vault; then resolutely pushed in. She had carried her own tiny mother-of-pearl candlestick with its long pink taper, and the colored wax guttered upon her fingers as she bent over the crib. A spark touched the little lace-

draped bed, and the flimsy stuff blazed. She extinguished the flames without calling for help, and burned her hand. She felt something like a sense of pleasure in the smart. It was the *moxa* to a misery which seemed to have settled in the marrow of her life. She buried her face in the lace, but did not kiss it. Her dry lips straightened before it and refused. She arranged the scorched drapery carefully in its place, and did not look back at it as she left the room, but when she had locked the door she put the key in her pocket. It was a small key, and it had been her pretty fancy to have it made of silver.

Cecil Murray was in the library when she came downstairs. Mrs. Grenfell's maid, Janet, had admitted him, it being the butler's evening off. Janet stood observantly in the hall.

"Do you want me, Madam?"

"If I do I will let you know," replied Mrs. Grenfell, coldly.

"Very well, Madam. I did not know but —" Something in the girl's expression or tone annoyed her mistress, and she turned with unusual sharpness; for her manner with servants was finished, and therefore considerate.

"Why should you know?" she demanded. She went abruptly into the library, and shut the door; a thing which Janet had never seen her do before when Mr. Murray was there. And Mr. Murray was often there.

He was standing before the fainting fire, and made as if to warm his fingers, although he was not cold. He advanced to meet her without speaking.

One of the long windows was open and unscreened. A creeper of woodbine, beginning to be crimson, blew between the lace draperies as if it were trying to get into the room. She, too, did not speak, but went up nervously and broke off the woodbine.

"I don't like the looks of it," were the first words she said.

"Why?"

"Oh — how can I tell? It intrudes. It looks as if it were trying to get hold of something."

"It is the nature of tendrils to cling," he suggested, smiling, but it was not a happy smile; and when, with a forced determination, she lifted her face to his, she found it fixed with a fatal seriousness. He had her book in his hand, and she thought he had read the poem that she was afraid to. It was Tennyson's "Love and Duty." He shut the book and put it upon the table where it lay between them.

"This is strong," he said, "but it does not close the subject."

"What does?" asked Allyria, suddenly.

"We must find out for ourselves," responded Murray. "No man, no woman, can judge, can decide for any other. By the way," he added lightly, as if he had been making a conventional call, "I brought my

car along. The evening is so warm — and there will be a moon if the clouds break. Will you ride with me?"

"No," said Allyria, distinctly.

He could see her hand, with the woodbine in it, clench where she had laid it against the lace upon her breast.

"I am sorry," suggested Murray, gently. "I thought you would. We can talk here if you would rather. I wish to talk — I have some things to say."

Allyria had sat down, and he towered above her; rather she had sunk down, and sat breathless.

"I don't think," she panted, "that I had better hear what you have to say."

"Pardon me." A delicate deprecation was in Murray's voice. "I shall say nothing that you do not choose to hear. I came to ask the honor of your company for a ride in my touring car."

"What time should we get back?" Allyria did not look at him; but he gazed at her tenaciously.

"That is for you to say. I am at your command, absolutely, always. You know that."

"If we could get back quite early —" wavered Allyria. When she found that he did not reply, she lifted her eyes timidly. His received them with a formidable intentness. He watched her in a steady silence which had the effect of argument.

Now suddenly Mrs. Grenfell thrust outward and

upward both her hands. It was as if her flesh pleaded for mercy which her spirit would not ask. As she did this, the crimson woodbine dropped from her bosom to her lap, and from her lap to the floor. He stooped without a word, and wound it like a bracelet on her wrist.

"There," he observed in a commonplace, comfortable tone, "shall we take a ride?"

"I will get my coat and things," she said. But she delayed, fumbling at the vine on her wrist, as if she were trying to tear it off. Murray stood perfectly still and scrutinized her.

"No," she said to herself, "it is not friendship."

She had long known as much as that. But she had never before admitted that she knew. The significance of the moment seemed to her as irrevocable as birth or death.

She stood looking about her with a frightened expression. Every detail in the room projected itself upon her. The oaken arms of the ceiling stretched and wrung themselves above her head. The books in the tall cases seemed to retreat upon their shelves. The fire was cold within the grate, and the dull gold panels on the walls darkened to a chilly brown. She was so sure that the fingers of the clock pointed at her that she could have screamed. He stood silently by the yellow reading-lamp. But she did not look at him.

She came down in her automobile coat, her hat tied with yards of pearl-colored chiffon. Murray stood in his touring coat and cap. Janet held the door open.

"You will want your rubber coat," the girl said anxiously, "in case it should storm."

"Oh, it will not storm," replied Mrs. Grenfell. "Will it?" She did not look at Janet, but at Murray.

"And the little bag, in case of an accident" — persisted Janet — "you will find it folded in the coat."

"Oh, there will not be an accident," repeated Mrs. Grenfell. "We shall not break down, Janet. But if we do — if we did, I should — Could we ride towards my cousin's, Mrs. Herman Joselyn's?" she asked, abruptly turning to Murray. "Then, if anything did happen, Janet, I could telephone you from there."

"If Mr. Grenfell should return," the girl suggested timidly, "I shall tell him that?"

"Mr. Grenfell will not return."

"Or if he should telephone, Madam?"

"Mr. Grenfell will not telephone. He telegraphed this noon. He will remain in Chicago until he starts for California. Mr. Grenfell will be in California for some months."

On the upper step she turned. "You may expect me by ten o'clock, Janet."

Murray had not spoken, but listened deferentially to her nervous words. When he helped her into the car he dismissed the chauffeur.

"Oh!" she protested, with a little conventional cry, "is n't Stokes going, too?"

But Murray answered, "I like to do my own steering in the dark."

He gave directions in a lowered voice to Stokes. Mrs. Grenfell sat trying not to hear them. She did not look at her own house, where Janet, in a narrow gleam of light, still held the front door ajar. Stokes stood with his finger at his cap, and the car started slowly. Allyria sat with her eyes fixed straight before her. She felt, although she did not see, that Murray was seated beside her with his long gauntleted hand upon the wheel.

He was a careful driver, and he wove through the streets of the city with deliberation. Allyria observed his light, firm touch upon the wheel. A crude sense of his masculine skill and strength aroused her admiration. She ventured for the first time to glance at his massive figure buttoned to the chin in the long coat. His visor cast a shadow on his face. They rode in a silence which embarrassed her, but she did not break it. He drove slowly through the lower city, and chose the suburban boulevard which led to the home of her relative, as she had asked. She perceived this with a curiously mingled sense of pleasure and of regret.

Up to this time he had not spoken one word, and had driven at a very leisurely pace. Now, as the street and the night widened before them he let the

car out. The first thing he said was, "Did he really send you that message this afternoon?"

"Why not? It is like him."

"And you did not know that he was going to California when he left you — when he left home? The telegram was the first you heard of it?"

"He goes where he chooses; he does what he pleases," replied Allyria, drearily.

Murray bit off an oath between his teeth.

"Why should you mind it," asked Allyria, "if I do not?"

"Not the discourtesy? Not the neglect?"

"We agreed not to mind," said Allyria. "You see, if you did not care enough to mind — don't you see?"

"I see," replied Murray. Their acquaintance had long since passed the invisible line on the other side of which one preserves the transparent but dignified fictions that conceal domestic misery. For a year he had known how unhappy she was, and had smoked his midnights out, thinking the situation through; he felt that somebody must, and he knew that she did not. He recognized perfectly that there was no escape for her in the respectable solution called divorce. Jackson Grenfell had bruised his wife with chronic indifference, and broken her with most of the other vices. But he had never flayed her alive with the fragments of the seventh commandment. In his way, Grenfell was a decent fellow; which was, in a sense,

the worst of it. Murray thought of him not unjustly, only contemptuously.

"You can't bear much more," he said, in a shattered voice.

"You have helped me to bear it," said Allyria, plaintively. "I have thought, I hoped, that this feeling — we used to call it friendship — it has been a comfort to me. I thought it would go on forever. I thought it was not like the other."

"What other?" demanded Murray.

It seemed to her that if he had so much as turned his head he would have weakened the tragedy of his words. He drove rapidly, looking straight before him. They had now left the boulevard, and were whirling through smooth suburban lands, into a yawning country where the lights were dim and few, and great ambushes of shadow swallowed them.

With the increasing motion of the machine Allyria's mind and heart spun madly. His presence, his nearness, their solitude, the silence of the deserted roads, their separateness from every other form of life except their mutual attraction, moved her to an emotion which at once entranced and terrified her. At moments she felt exalted, as if she had been lifted into mid-ether, and as if she were flying from star to star. She had a sense of something like spiritual ecstasy. Then it was as if she plunged, and found

herself in a shoreless and bottomless abyss where she drowned from depth to depth.

There was no moon, as he had promised her, for the clouds had massed upon it. The wind was rising, and drove in their faces and down their throats.

She dared not look at Cecil Murray. In the broad car she shrank away from him. She would not have allowed her soft shoulder to touch his arm — no, not for her soul's life. She was afraid, and for the first time she said to herself that she was afraid.

The machine now ran like a fugitive, and swayed from side to side. Murray experienced the immoral madness of speed. In the open country the languorous perfumes of dying summer swam from the late September night. Gulfs beyond gulfs of warm darkness opened before the two. Through these the car flew with a recklessness which she was surprised to find did not alarm her. Once, when they blew by a kerosene street lamp, he turned and regarded her.

Her long veil wavered about her head and throat like smoke. Out of it her face blazed — fire-white. As the car dashed around a corner of the village street an onset of wind took the veil and twisted it around and around Murray's neck. The thing was faint with the perfume of her hair, her cheek. They sat united in that yoke of gauze.

"God help us!" he said.

Allyria's face was as bewildered as a lost child's.

But the man's was definite and fixed. It assumed an expression that she had never seen, and before which she felt the pitiable helplessness which is the doom of woman. As she sat with her chin upturned appealingly through the haze of her veil, drops dashed upon their heads. She was the first to recover herself.

"Oh," she cried, "there is going to be a storm! There *is* a storm!"

"We will find your rubber coat," he said soothingly.

He buttoned the coat at her throat. She perceived that his fingers trembled. In an instant the wind had risen to a gale. Before they could say, "It rains," a deluge opened upon them. There was a menace of distant thunder, and then a roar in which they could not hear each other speak. Allyria wailed a little.

"Oh, I wish we had brought Stokes along — or Janet! How far are we from Anna Joselyn's?"

In the turmoil Murray could not hear the words, but he understood the tone.

"Compose yourself," he said gently, "I will get you to Joselyn's — if I can."

Now, suddenly and strangely, the woman's emotion reacted upon itself. At once, she did not think it important whether she went to Anna Joselyn's. They were spinning through a tunnel of willows which overarched a deserted street. He slackened the pace of the car, and brought it to a stop in the cone of darkness. Down this the acetylene lamps searched. Behind

the man and woman their road was shut in blackness, and before them they could see but a very little way. There was something inexpressibly wild in this unrelated light; as if it served to cut them off from rather than unite them to the common world. She felt that he had changed his position, and that his hand crept toward her.

"Why do you stop?" asked Allyria. Then she uttered a low cry. "My hand! You have hurt my hand!" She held up her smarting fingers in the dark. "I burned them. It was just before you came. I could not get my glove on. It aches a good deal. And you — and you —"

"How did it happen?" cried Murray, savage with remorse. "Why did you not tell me? What have you been doing?"

But Allyria shook her head. "It is nothing," she pleaded. "I do not want to talk about it — not to *you*." The emphasis on the last word was not too fine for Murray's acute ear.

He unwound the veil fiercely from his neck, and set both hands upon the wheel. The car leaped, and ran. It dashed out of the willow tunnel like a thing pursued. They shot into a long country road, feebly lighted, and sparsely settled. Again, beneath a smoking street lamp they turned and stared at each other. In the anger of the storm she leaned a little toward him.

"It does not matter," she said; "I do not care.

Go where you please. You know best what we ought to do."

The words were taken from her bleached lips by a bolt of blue lightning, and the two bent beneath a tempest in which heaven and earth and hell had become indistinguishable. The man, recalled by the inexorable responsibilities of his position, felt his way gravely through the alternations of glare and gloom, whose ominous acceleration seemed to him less dangerous than the alternations of their own emotion. But the woman had ceased to cherish responsibility — she had cast it solidly upon him; he felt that she was not helping him, and that she might not help him any more. They rode at a creeping pace through the streets of a dripping, empty village. The car cowered before the storm which chased and flogged its occupants. Drenched and bewildered, Allyria clung to a fold of Murray's long coat.

Her lips moved. She tried to say, "I never saw such lightning in my life." But he could not hear her. She added a few words. Afterwards she did not know whether she were sorry or glad that he had not heard those. She felt more exalted than terrified. It was to her as if they two were driving through space upon a meteorite, detached from some time-worn planet, and falling upon a new one, uninhabited, and therefore without history. She did not rebel against the man any more than the machine did.

She had yielded her fate so dreamily, so utterly to his guidance that she asked no questions when she felt the car swerve abruptly from the village road and take a mighty bound into the dark. Quivering through every metal nerve, the automobile stopped short. Bars of crimson fire like the grating of a mighty gate scorched the sky as Murray leaped, and held up his arms to her.

"Get out!" he cried. "This will be a hurricane for aught I know. Jump!"

"Are we at Cousin Anna's?" wavered Mrs. Grenfell.

"No matter where we are! Come, I tell you! Come!"

Not knowing why, not knowing where, and not caring very much, Allyria sprang. His arms received but did not retain her. He grasped her burned hand; even then, he remembered to take her by the wrist so that he should not hurt her; and she heard him say, "Run!"

As they pushed on, scrambling and struggling with the tornado, she was aware of indistinct articulation, and that the voice was other than his. A light, neither blood-red, nor demon blue, nor ghastly white—a light not from the scarified heavens, but of the human earth — streamed upon her, and she stumbled into it. She now perceived that Murray had driven the automobile into the front yard of a country home; the machine stood trembling like a frightened dog beneath a large elm in whose veins ran the blood of a hundred

years; she felt that she crushed the life out of some drenched garden flowers as she ran away from the tree. The house was small, and painted white; its front door was thrown wide, and brightly lighted from within. The two, pelted by rain and chased by thunder, followed the gleam, and came panting to the wooden steps.

A woman stood in the doorway. She held one hand at her temples to peer out; but the other was occupied by a crutch whose fellow leaned against her dark woolen dress. She was a tall, rather comely woman of composed manners. When she said, —

"Come in! Why, come right in!" there was felt to be a compelling quality in her voice; it was not, to Murray's surprise, what one calls an uncultivated voice. He lifted his cap from his dripping forehead.

"Madam," he began, "we have taken the liberty—"

"Why, of course," interrupted the woman. "I am sorry you should have chosen so stormy a night. This way. Be so good as to shut the door — it beats in so. The lady had better take her wet coat right off. Will you hang it on the hat-tree for her? You see I am a little disabled. I will call my husband. Come right in. The parlor is dark, but we will have everything as pretty as possible for you in a minute. — Mr. Titus! Mr. Titus!" Then, "He must be in the barn talking to the horse," she added. "Our old horse is so afraid of thunder — we always go out and speak to

her about it. There! I hear him in the kitchen. He will light up for you directly. If you will please find some seats till he gets here?"

She slipped the second crutch beneath her arm, and swung herself across the oilcloth of the narrow entry. The two, dripping on the carpet (it was plainly the parlor carpet) of the dim room into which they had been ushered, heard from the lips of their hostess these unexpected words,

"Abel! *Abel!* Father! Mr. Titus! Here are some people — in all this storm — who want to be married."

The master of the house came in with a kerosene lamp in his hand; he found the man and woman of the world touched with an obvious embarrassment which appeared to arouse in him no surprise whatever. He was a person of some presence, with a good pulpit figure, neatly dressed in clerical black, much worn, and he made at once the impression that his experience was as white as his hair. Although he had what one calls the Christian eyes, they were direct and keen; the glance which he aimed at his guests returned upon itself with a slightly baffled expression. It occurred to Murray that their host was not lacking in a sense of humor, and that he shared to an extent with them the amusement of the travelers at finding themselves derelicts of the storm, shipwrecked upon a country parsonage.

They stood in a plain room. It evidently was no

unused vault, like the parlors of the farmers and mechanics, its neighbors, but quite accustomed to society. A brown tapestry carpet of a small pattern met a pale cartridge paper which mercifully relieved a few religious engravings. Above the mantel was one secular picture: a framed photograph of Sir Frederick Leighton's "Wedded." In the fireplace the wood was laid, but not lighted. There was a centre-table with books, and a metal lamp. The minister lighted the bright, hot lamp while he said with a hospitable wave of the burned match, "Pray be seated."

For the two were still standing, with an awkwardness foreign to their class.

"I am afraid we are almost too wet," ventured Mrs. Grenfell, but she sat down upon a brown rep sofa. Murray remained standing.

"I must go out and see to my car," he suggested, "as soon as the storm holds up."

"This has been as near a hurricane as we are apt to get in this climate," observed the minister, "and I fear that you must have borne the brunt of it. The lady will have suffered. Let her come to our hearth."

He stooped and struck a match to the fire. Mrs. Grenfell went up and put her narrow feet upon the fender. Her skirts were wet. A soft voice welled at her side, "What a pity! Can't I lend you something?"

The minister's wife stood eagerly, moving up a

little stand, which she pushed with one of her crutches. The tray held sponge cake and unfermented grape juice — plainly, the usual entertainment offered by the parsonage to its bridal couples.

"And now, sir," said the minister, holding out his hand, "you have the license, I presume? You will understand, of course, that it is necessary for me to examine it."

"You have mistaken the nature of our errand," replied Murray, setting his shaven lips together. "It is not what you very naturally supposed." His long, cynical face paled a little. "We were taking a ride in my touring car, and were overtaken by the shower. All we seek under your roof, sir, is shelter until the storm has passed."

The words beat like a bell in Allyria's brain, and seemed to hit through and knock from temple to temple on either side. Her face scorched so that she made a feint of removing her veil, and in so doing, managed for a moment to shrink behind the gauze.

"All we seek is shelter — all we seek is shelter till the storm has passed." Her mind repeated the phrase automatically.

"Ah?" said the minister, with a slow, rising inflection, "I beg your pardon."

As he spoke, the house quivered to its skeleton, and such a billow of wind was followed by such a concussion that the four occupants of the parsonage

parlor got to their feet in one huddled group. Allyria trembled with fright, and Murray instinctively stepped to her side. Their hands reached to each other, but fell apart. The minister put his arm about the waist of his lame wife, who leaned more upon him than upon her crutches. An arrow of lightning seemed to try to enter the room, but to be driven back by the lamplight and the firelight. Murray wondered if he could be mistaken in thinking that the husband and wife had glanced at their guests, and exchanged a significant, if not a solemn look.

"The rain is lessening," remarked Cecil Murray, uncomfortably, as soon as he could. "I will go out between the drops and see to my machine."

"Allow me to be of any assistance to you that I can," said the Reverend Abel Titus, heartily. "Ruth, my dear? This room is pretty warm. Shall I open the window for you before I step out?"

The minister's wife nodded and smiled, over her crutches.

"Thank you, Father. You always think of everything." She tossed the words at him as if they had been a kiss.

The two men went out, and the women were left together. Mrs. Grenfell did not look at Murray as he passed her. She had resumed her seat by the fire, which was now blazing cordially, and she sat trying to get dry; she had folded her green cloth skirt back

from her silk petticoat. She felt that the eyes of her hostess rested upon her fixedly; in them was a curious union of expressions which only a woman could have understood. A sheer feminine interest in the costume of the stranger battled with something like a sense of moral responsibility for her which the guest was astonished to find that she did not resent. The quality of a dark green broadcloth dress, the silk frills upon a petticoat, also green, the size of a damp, dainty boot, the tint and texture of a long chiffon veil, the pattern and nature of the cream lace showing beneath an imported and embroidered jacket — these things the pastor's wife was not too old or too religious to estimate for what they represented. But clothes never muddled Mrs. Titus. She had been able to perceive that she was not entertaining an adventuress, over-dressed, and under-bred. In five minutes she had classified Mrs. Grenfell correctly.

"Are you quite comfortable, dear?" asked the hostess. She had a motherly manner to which Allyria felt all the child in her nature — and there was a good deal of it — turn and lean. "You are sure I could n't lend you anything? I have one black silk dress — "

Allyria shook her head; she had not yet found herself able to speak. She had a vision of that silk — the country dressmaking — the sacredness of the material — the pathetic way in which it was cherished.

Then poignantly she felt that she would not have been worthy to wear that old black silk. She sat looking straight at the fire. It did not occur to her how seldom the parsonage could afford an open wood fire. She had never thought of fuel as costing anything.

"You see we have a little wood-lot," explained Mrs. Titus, as if she apologized for an extravagance that must be apparent to all classes of society. "Mr. Titus saws and chops it himself. I don't know of anything like an open fire — it 's so homey, is n't it? There is only one other thing makes me feel the same way. That 's sunsets. But it 's quite different, after all; it is only the lightness and the deepness that are alike. Sunsets carry you up; they lift you out of everything — like good music, or thinking about heaven. But an open fire — your *own* open fire — why, that keeps you at home, and makes you love to be there, and makes you thank God you 've got one. And I 'd rather be at home than in heaven, any day — at least — except for one thing," added the minister's wife, with a sudden reserve.

It had not yet suggested itself to Allyria, but it did a little after, that the woman's freedom of speech was not natural to her, and might be the accident of embarrassment, or of some other state of mind and feeling, not quite clear.

"Has your husband broken his machine?" asked the pastor's wife, so naturally that it was impossible

to take offense at the question. "They usually do. They break as easily as a woman's heart — those great metal things. I have noticed that."

She chattered on, giving her guest full time to recover herself and say: —

"The gentleman is not my husband. My husband is away from home. His business calls him to California. It is an old family friend, and I — I went to ride with him. We meant to go to my cousin's, Mrs. Herman Joselyn's. How far is that from here?"

"Oh, not far at all, not quite a mile. We know Mrs. Joselyn. She comes to our church, summers. That must be very hard — what you say about your husband being away — that he should go to California without you. I don't think I could bear that. Mr. Titus and I — why, we have never been separated for a week — I mean not since the first year. Once, he went to a convention and was gone four days. We have been married thirty-seven years. But then I don't suppose there are any other husbands like *Mr. Titus.* When I think of what he has been to me — what he has done for me — "

"What has he been? What has he done?" interrupted the visitor, turning down the hem of her broadcloth dress to dry the lower edge before the brilliant fire.

"Why, he has loved me, that is all," replied the elder wife.

A blighting bitterness froze across Allyria's face. She thrust out her hands to the placid parsonage fire; the woodbine bracelet shook upon her wrist. The pastor's wife was silent for a moment; it was as if she collected her courage before she said, very slowly: —

"This is the house of a Protestant priest. We are used to caring for strangers — the minister and I. Many persons ask Mr. Titus for his advice, and some — they are more likely to be women — talk with me. Even if we cannot help, don't you see, it does good sometimes just to speak? Our life — I don't know how to make you understand it — but our life has been a life of listening to what other people had to say about themselves. I tell you this so that you may not think me rude; so that you may forgive me if I say too much. My dear, I am older than you. I have lived a harder life. It has been a different one; I understand that as well as you do. But I know a troubled woman when I see one. If there were anything in the world I could do — Don't! Oh, don't! You would be sorry to break down before *him*. He may come in any minute. Is n't there anything that you would like to say?"

"No," said Allyria, dashing some scorching tears from her cheeks. "I have n't anything to say. You would not understand. You have been too happy. You have never been — perplexed. Did you ever

ride through the willows on a mad machine in a hurricane and in the dark?"

"No," said the minister's wife, gently. "We have taken the old horse, and jogged along the road."

"Well, then," said Allyria, triumphantly, "What do *you* know about it?"

"You look faint," replied the hostess. "Suppose you try the grape-juice. I made it myself, for our brides. Just a swallow? It 's the same we use at the Sacrament."

Allyria put the holy wine to her lips, but set it down untasted.

"I — can't," she pleaded. She pushed the tray away.

Murray stood beneath the century-old elm, and tinkered his machine. The rain had practically ceased, and the thunder complained from a distance.

"The storm is over," he said dogmatically, while he fitted his tire.

"It is liable to return," observed the country parson, holding the lantern higher. "That is the nature of storms, you know — such storms, I mean; these untimely ones for which nobody is prepared. It is only the unaccountable in life which gets the best of us. We are generally equal to what we can understand. A dog or a chicken in the country will keep out of the way of any four-horse team, but the first big delivery motor that gets so far will run them down."

"You speak in parables," remarked Cecil Murray, with a guarded smile.

"It is a professional habit; it dates a good way back. A Rabbi in Palestine began it, two thousand years ago. Is there any other injury to your machine besides the punctured tire?"

"None whatever," replied Murray, promptly. "I shall soon have this set, and we shall be able to resume our ride."

"Forwards? Or backwards?" asked the minister, abruptly.

"I have not decided," answered Murray, pushing his visored cap back from his forehead to return the direct look of his host.

"Then, if I cannot help you in any way — " began the minister, making as if he would return to the house.

"Not about the tire, certainly — thank you."

"Nor, I presume, as to the direction of your route?" ventured the other with the self-possession and tact of one whose life's business has been to win the souls of men.

"Every man's decisions are his own," replied Murray, curtly. "It is his business."

"On the contrary," argued the Reverend Abel Titus, "every decision is the business of society. There is a saying that no man liveth to himself. It 's old, but it 's pretty true. Do I hold the lantern right?"

"You have been very kind. I don't think I shall need the light held any more. It might stand on that stone, and save you the trouble."

"If you are sure I cannot serve you."

"Quite sure," said Murray, bending his tire composedly.

The Reverend Mr. Titus bowed, and went into the house. He opened and shut the front door softly, so softly that he did not disturb the two women; but, as he stood hesitating, he heard a word or two which deterred him, and he turned away. His feet made no sound upon the oilcloth in the entry. He latched the door of his study as if he had been a burglar, or a spirit, and sat down, thoughtfully, before his old, cheap desk, among his books.

Cecil Murray, under the elm tree, laid down his tools and wiped his hands carefully upon some wisps of waste. The machine appeared to try to turn and look at him. His face showed rigid and uneasy. He could not have told why it seemed to him that he must not remain where he was a moment longer. He felt as if invisible forces got behind him and pushed him towards the house. The glare of the automobile lamps followed, but fell short of him. His feet, as Allyria's had done, crushed flowers as he walked thoughtlessly across the garden, and so reached the open window. His lips opened to speak to Mrs. Grenfell, and tell her that he was there, but they

closed without a word. No bolt from heaven could have smitten him as did the thing which he heard. It was the sound of a single, stifled sob — a dry sob, for Allyria was not crying.

The fire in the parsonage hearth was burning gently; it had a steady, sober flame. The two women sat before it, side by side. Beyond them stood the little table with its sacramental wine. He knew as well as if he had been told that Allyria had not touched it — that she had not dared.

One hand shielded her eyes from the fire. There was a splash upon her wrist, — it was the crimson vine that he had bound there. The older woman was speaking; he noticed that quality in her voice which he had observed at first; it vibrated now with the controlled passion of a person naturally reticent, who has elected to lavish her personal experience for another's sake.

"We were under age, and our people wanted us to wait; so we took it into our own hands. We ran away, and got married. We thought that was love. But, my dear, it was n't. And then came our honeymoon, and we thought *that* was love. But now, I see it was n't. So, when the honeymoon was over — you are a married woman, and you know. When kissing turns into living, then the tug begins. The first time he was cross to me I thought my heart would break. But that was n't heartbreak. When

he had to go to Chicago — to try to find a position there — and my baby was born too soon while he was away, I thought I had the worst trouble that could happen. But *that* was n't trouble. Before he got home — he never saw the little thing alive — the baby died. Oh, did you lose yours, too? Oh, I did n't know! How thoughtless it was of me! I *am* thoughtless sometimes, in spite of all. Don't cry! There, there! Don't! How long did he live? Was his father there to help you bear it?"

"Damn these old people!" muttered Murray, bringing his clenched fist down upon the window-sill. "What are they doing to her?" He would have pushed into the house, but recalled himself, and paced to and fro savagely. He was so disturbed that he did not notice the signs of the returning storm which spat upon him sullenly where he stood. As yet, there was no lightning, and his antagonistic figure warred with the shadows of an increasing gloom, out of which he drove back to the glimmering window it seemed, scarcely knowing why, or even that he did so. Above the two women the clasped figures of the wedded lovers in Leighton's great picture arrested his attention. He looked at the picture with a horrible envy. The voice of Mrs. Titus crept on more composedly.

"It was the baby's dying, I think, that did it all. He never 'got religion' in any revival — he only got

a new way of seeing things. He came home from the cemetery one night and said: 'Ruth! I've got it in me to go to the devil. I've got it in me to go the other way. I'm going to tackle some job that will *keep me* straight. I am going to be a minister, so help me God, and that little dead thing out there!'

"You would n't think it now — seeing us in this poor, small parish — what a preacher Mr. Titus has been. Everybody that knows about ministers at all — but you don't. You would know about automobiles and polo, but not religious matters. My husband had a city church. He was very successful. He was an eminent preacher. Fifteen hundred people came to hear him Sunday nights — mostly men, young men; they stood in the aisles to hear him; he kept — you could not understand how many he kept from going wrong. We were very happy. We had a beautiful home. He was n't one thing there and another thing in the pulpit. He was so kind to me that I could have knelt and kissed his feet — any wife would feel that way to a *kind* husband.

"And when the other baby died, he — he comforted me so! For every trouble we had was half a trouble, we bearing it together. And every joy we had was twice a joy, because we had the joy together. And afterwards our little boy lived to be three years old. And we thought — we expected — but he died, too. And that, you see, is what I meant when I spoke

of heaven. People write about immortality, and reason this way and that — as if they knew! Three dead children, my dear — they make the best argument for immortality I have ever found.

"But that was n't trouble either — I mean we came to feel so afterwards, because it was so much better for the children, like sending them into a healthier climate, and because dying is the least of human miseries, after all, you know."

It had now occurred to Cecil Murray that he was exceeding his rights as a listener to this pathetic feminine interview, and he stepped back suddenly from the window. The movements of the elder woman's lips — the eager lifting of Allyria's delicate brows — the passionate clasping and unclasping of her hands — passed before him like a beautiful pantomime from whose action he could not rend himself. The rain began to strike him where he stood. The returning storm was lulled by strange and ominous calms. In these, broken sentences were tossed out to him: —

"When I got well, you see, I never got well. I could not walk. For six months I could not turn in bed. It was a year before I put my feet to the floor. I said: 'Doctor, you call it rheumatism; I call it hell' — the wife of the best man God ever made — I swore at the doctor. I told him it was damnable. But Mr. Titus did not hear. And the climate was

against me. And there I lay. I went to pieces. I lost my temper, I lost my pluck, I lost my patience, I lost my faith, I lost my looks — and I don't care if I tell you, for you 're a woman — I minded that most of all.

"Yes, I had put three children into their little coffins, and borne it. I could not bear it to be a crippled creature. I got perfectly demoralized. I was unattractive, and unlovable, and exacting, and hard to live with, and ugly enough to hate. But he — he loved me — in spite of — everything.

"My dear, he gave up his great parish and took me South. We had n't anything but our salary — he took me to Florida, and there we stayed. We were so poor as you could never think — oh, very poor. He had some Sundays' preaching, and we kept a garden, and we had a few orange trees, and he tutored boys for rich people that came South winters. He took care of me, and lifted me, and did the housework for me (he said he learned everything but how to do up bosom shirts), and sitting up nights with me, and going without things to eat to save them for *me!* — oh, he was one of the sons of God!

"And when I got a little better — for it had been a good while, and the world forgets, and pulpits fill up, and nobody cares for the absent man — when we came North again, then his own health had begun to break. So he found no place but just the little parishes,

and we went from one to another — each one smaller — and so to this one — but not a word! Never a word to let me think he was sorry, or that he had made any sacrifice for me. Why, he never seemed to know that a faded, crippled wife had cost him his career — his brilliant career, so noble, so valuable! And every day he was the same; hard times and easier, hungry or fed, warm or shivering — for we have gone hungry, and we 've been cold — but never love-hungry, and never love-cold in all the life we 've lived together. What did you say? Yes, *that 's* what I call love. Don't cry! Don't cry!"

An imprecation hurled itself from Murray's lips, for he saw that Allyria was weeping quietly.

"They are playing on her sensibilities," he muttered. "I will take her right away."

He made two steps towards his car, but fell back, staggering against the side of the house. He thought for an instant that he had gone black-blind, and should never see again. A bolt of beautiful death-white lightning, like a bomb in a bouquet, was followed by a report which shattered the skies.

The voices of the two women within rose in terror. The minister flung open the front door and ran down the steps.

"Are you hurt?" he called. "Thank God! No — no! the house has not been struck. It is the tree."

"God!" cried Murray, "there are fifteen gallons of gasoline in that tank!"

With the crude impulse of a man to save his machine, he dashed towards it, but the minister gripped him by the shoulder and held him back. Before the two women could get out of the house, the automobile flared, and exploded where it stood under the stricken tree. Murray and the minister ran for water and the garden hose, but the doomed car hissed sullenly and blazed on.

"Let it burn!" said Murray, coldly. "Water is n't much use with gasoline. It won't last long. It 's too inflammable. I am sorry you have lost your tree." He stood apart, with his hands in his pockets, and said no more. He thought, "I never can take her to ride again in that car."

The minister came up and touched him gently on the arm. "You had a narrow escape. Do you know it?" His kindly voice was agitated.

"Had I?" asked Murray.

Allyria had made one mad movement towards him, but checked herself. She stood stolidly in the storm. She did not seem to know that it was raining. He did not look at her. He did not dare.

The fire in the parsonage parlor burned as if nothing had happened, and the four gathered about it with the instinct of chill and wet and danger for the

human hearth. The Reverend Mr. Titus had his Bible in his hand.

"We are accustomed," he said, "at this hour of the evening, to hold family prayers. If you and the lady would like to join with us — sir, do you object?"

"We are your guests," said Murray, in his critical, cynical voice. "We will not interfere with the habit of your household."

He sat down beside Mrs. Grenfell on the brown rep sofa. They did not look at each other. The minister read something from the New Testament — they could not have told what — and then he knelt. Allyria fixed her eyes upon the fire. But Murray looked at the wedded lovers who clung above it.

The minister began to pray: —

"Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling-place in all generations, and in Thy hands are the hearts and fates of men. Life is a straight and narrow way. How shall we walk in it? Death is a gulf beneath our stumbling feet. We have tottered upon its edge to-night, and Thou hast remembered us, and Thy mighty arm has caught us back. Teach us why! Make us fit to learn for what reason we have been spared from the arrows of the storm. We perceive that life is a great energy, and that its decisions, and the consequences of its elections, are still within our control. We thank Thee for life, and for that sacred thing, a man's free will. We thank Thee for love,

which is the breath of life, and for the symbol of love, our human homes — for their sanctity, and their delicate ideals; for the tenderness of women, and the honor of men, and the memories of dead children. We bless Thee for the high mystery of marriage, whose sacred fire is an altar fire, and must be fed by sacrifice. We thank Thee for the chance to do the hard, right thing."

The minister's voice faltered. He was unaccountably moved. His prayer came to an abrupt termination, and without a word he left the room. His lame wife followed him; she shut the study door and flung herself and her crutches into his arms.

"Abel, I told her everything that ever happened — almost. I feel *such a goneness* — you can't know!"

"I think you have won," said the Reverend Abel Titus, wearily. "But I don't know — I don't know! They are sore bestead, God help them!"

Murray and Allyria were alone in the parsonage parlor. Both had risen, and stood facing one another. He looked very tall in his wet coat. Their eyes clung with the candor of an immeasurable misery. Allyria seemed to herself for a terrible instant to be groping on a foothold's width between a wall and an abyss — her unhappy marriage, and her impending desolation. Then she spoke: "I am sorry you have lost your machine. It was such a beauty!"

As if they had been chatting at some function, and automobiles were the uppermost subject, Cecil Murray bowed.

"I shall go on to Anna Joselyn's," observed Mrs. Grenfell. "She will telephone to Janet. Mr. Titus will drive me over with the old horse that is afraid of thunder."

"Very well," said Murray.

"And you?" cried Allyria, with an uncontrollable break in the poise of her voice and manner. "What will *you* do?"

"Whatever you command," replied Murray, dully. "There are late trains. I can send Stokes for the machine; he can take the remains to-morrow."

"Very well," said Allyria, in her turn. "I have been thinking," she added, "that I may try California myself before the winter is over."

"To join Mr. Grenfell?"

"In that case, I should join Mr. Grenfell. I might not"— she stopped, and began again — "if I should start suddenly — not have a chance to say good-by — " She held out her hand.

"I might hurt it," he argued, "if that is the burned one." He did not take it, and she let it drop with a wounded expression.

"Is there any harm in my having this?" he asked with his melancholy smile. He caught the vine from

her wrist, and lifted it to his lips. Then he unbuttoned his coat, and put the bruised tendrils in his breast pocket.

The minister brought the old horse to the door, and Murray helped Mrs. Grenfell into the shabby buggy. Mrs. Titus stood leaning on her crutches.

"There!" she said, "she 's forgotten that beautiful veil."

"If you will entrust it to me"— began Murray, eagerly. "I could return it to her."

The minister's wife hesitated perceptibly.

"Mr. Titus might drive me over with it in the morning. I should like to see her again — if I had any reason to."

Murray lifted his hat without remark, and strode away.

Allyria looked through the back of the buggy, where the curtain was rolled up. She watched him walking heavily down the dark, wet road. Above the tunnel of willows the clouds stirred, and she saw the forehead of a tragic moon. The minister did not speak. Allyria's burned hand crept to her pocket and closed upon the little silver key.

CHRISTOPHORUS

SOME years ago there appeared in a considerable mountain town of New England a remarkable man. Call the place Hillcrest, the State New Hampshire, and the man Herman Strong. To the still living is due all possible consideration, and, whether living or dead, the identity of the actors in this story will not be betrayed.

He was a clergyman or a minister — his parishioners never felt quite sure which. He was first observed among the summer people, as a boarder in an ancient gray house set closely against the river, and occupied by an old and irritable deaf woman, who, being hopelessly mortgaged, patronized a few lodgers, but had hitherto drawn the line of fate at "mealers."

This elderly person — her name was Rock — succumbed unexpectedly to the personal persuasions of the clerical stranger, and accepted him, if without cordiality, at least without protest, as a member of her household. A home, such as it was, she sourly provided for him.

There was a vacancy at that time in the pulpit of the leading church, and Herman Strong preached now and then, as a matter of courtesy, to the unshepherded

flock. An astonished and increasing audience began to follow him. It was a Congregational church of the elder New England type, and it developed that the preacher was not to the denomination born or bound. It was supposed that he had been trained to the Episcopal liturgy, of which he made use when he chose, and it was suspected that he had cultivated a certain freedom of religious thought or belief such as would have made it difficult for him to fetter himself to any one of the stricter sects. He frankly told the committee as much, when the warming interest of the people developed that autumn into a formal call.

"Your thoughts are not my thoughts, nor your ways my ways," he said. "But your Christ is my Christ. I will consider your wishes, and deal with you again about this matter. If you would like a stated interval in which to change your own minds — pray feel at liberty to mention one. You and I cannot work together with reservations on either side. Our relation must be that of a great attachment, or none at all. It will be outside the ecclesiastical conventionalities, any how you look at it," observed the minister, dreamily.

The committee stared.

"Our people are set upon you," said the chairman, slowly. "And it appears to be the impression in this community that you are a child of God. We ain't

given to unmaking our minds round these parts. We don't want any opportunity for reconsidering our views. We want *you*, sir."

"But an ordination — an installation — the usual ecclesiastical ceremonies — these are impracticable under your polity and on my basis," argued the minister. "And your people value such things — frankly — more than I do."

"We ain't valuing anything just about now more 'n we value *you*, sir," persisted the chairman. "There 's those that have been in affliction. And there 's those that have sat under your preaching. We are instructed, sir, not to take no for an answer from you, Mr. Strong."

"I will become your pastor for a year," said the young clergyman, suddenly. "You shall not ordain nor install me, nor play the heretic for my sake. I will fill your pulpit, since you wish it, and I will comfort your afflicted — if I can."

Thus it befell that Herman Strong became in this candid and unusual manner the spiritual leader of the Hillcrest people — a relation which, begun without ecclesiastical formality, continued from ploughing to harvest, from maple-leaf to maple-blossom — one might say, from heart-beat to heart-beat; for whether he were heretic or whether he were "sound," the people loved the man, and indeed, as time revealed, he grew so dear to them that had he been a Boston

Unitarian they would not have yielded him to any council — and more cannot be said.

From old photographs in parish albums, and from still vivid traditions cherished in Hillcrest homes, it is to be gathered that Herman Strong was possessed of a certain memorable personal beauty. He was not massively built, but tall; he showed the physique of a student who had dabbled in athletics — the strong head, the long, thin, muscular hands. He had a nervous gait, a manly laugh, and supple motions.

His coloring was dark, but not swarthy; his forehead balanced, and an eye as direct as an N ray blazed into the soul. His mouth, which was delicate, though full, gave the impression of singular moral purity; it held a cool gravity, while melting into warm, sudden smiles. The man carried in feature and figure and manner the unworldliness possible only to one who has known the world.

If he had known the world, he had left it; and if he had weighed it, he had not overmeasured it; for he sank himself in the plain life of the Hillcrest parish like a diver who was drowned in content. He preached, he prayed, he visited, he rebuked, he consoled, like any ordinary country pastor; while yet it was always felt that he did none of these things in the ordinary ways. Particularly was it said of the last of them that he exercised the consoling function of the Protestant priest as no other preacher known to the

town or to the hills had ever done. Old persons with old familiar griefs so heavy that their bent shoulders had become crooked beneath the load, and straight young people with new griefs that they had not had time to learn how to bear, stole to the now thronged church to hear the preacher reaching for their heart-strings that he might untie these and loose the burden, as he did — who knew how he did it?

Before he had been with them for six months, the Hillcrest parish had divined a beautiful word by which to name him among themselves. They called him — half timidly, as if not sure whether they infringed upon some iron doctrine or offended some gentle sanctity — they called him the comforter. It used to seem to the young preacher sometimes that his intellect, his education, his experience of life, all had gone for little, except to train his heart. The fires of this were strong, and everything fed them. He had the greatest gift with which Heaven can endow a human spirit — a powerful and sensitive sympathy regulated by good sense. He perceived, he suffered, the pangs that were not his own — not disdaining false miseries because they were the consequence of ignorance or vanity, or some remediable weakness, but proving himself swift as a cherishing angel to recognize true pain. Hurt souls crawled to him like wounded dogs to a master. He had but to extend a hand, and they crept to his feet.

Perhaps the most extraordinary thing about the preacher was, that while the sad sought him, the glad did not shun him. He was the confidant of every college boy, the friend of clerks and apprentices, the adviser of girls whose emotions he held at wing's length from his personality. In truth, it was said of him that he had no personal relations with women. Many doubted if he had ever cultivated such; at all events he found neither space nor inclination for them at this period of his life; and his influence grew accordingly.

It rapidly became, in fact, the most powerful influence ever known in the hill country, and time diminished nothing of its force. Spiritual energy has her experts, as well as matter, and perhaps, like science, tends in the later times to specialization. Herman Strong loved boys and golf, music and skates, a good clean story and a good time. But he loved more to ease the unhappy if he might. This was his spiritual passion. He was as familiar with the miseries of his people as the doctor was with their tongues and pulses.

He had pursued for some time — I think it was for nearly a year — the path of least resistance in usefulness, as we all do; pouring the flame of his fine nature where it most naturally went, and offering anywhere and everywhere, and to any soul that claimed it, the white fire of his consolation — when there occurred an incident which caused him deep reflection, and to a certain extent some readjustment of his noble and

tender instincts. At all events it guided these for the first time in a direction where his heart had not hitherto traveled.

The gray house of Mrs. Rock, as we said, stood close to a river; so close that it scarcely missed of being a pier. In the rectangle formed by the main house and the ell in which the minister had his study, a neglected garden huddled timidly like a forsaken old person. Most of the flowers and shrubs had ceased to bloom; the place crept down into a scanty slope of grass and flags which lapped the water sadly. A few gray planks, once a boat-landing, crumbled among the flags. The minister had put a boat out for his own unprofessional recreation; but he found small time to use it. He was sitting at his study window one August night, at the full of the moon. It was a Sunday night, and he had preached twice, and was tired. The hour was late, and the house was as still as the shadows of the trees which sentineled the river. These were chiefly maple or birch, and cast a thick shadow like carved bronze, or a fine one, delicately trembling.

The river moved stealthily, flung out by the moon like a banner that had been dropped from some height and caught between the two dark wooded banks, where it lay tangled in the unrealities of leaves. In a fold of light the minister's boat swung sleepily.

The flags that indicated the dip of meadow-land into which the garden suddenly sank had a sharp look

like spears, and took the moonlight on their points. The old landing, whose gray surface was streaked here and there by the yellow of a fresh pine plank, had the observant air of deserted things; as if it awaited action or incident of which it was defrauded.

As the preacher sat, with his elbows on his study window-sill, watching the river, he was made suddenly aware that he was not alone in doing so. A figure, darkly draped, rose between his eyes and the water, and he perceived from her motions — for it was the figure of a woman — that she was wading through the resistance of the flags. After a little hesitation, in which he could suppose that she paused to glance at the house, or, more particularly, at the wing, she climbed upon the landing from the side, and stood revealed and distinct in the unreal light — a young woman, dressed in translucent black, through which her arms and neck gleamed faintly. Her hands, knotted in front of her, began to swing up and down with the preparatory movements of a diver. Otherwise she was perfectly still. She made no motion towards the boat — that would have reassured him — but disregarded it.

The preacher hesitated no longer, but quietly opened the outside door of his study, and, without sound, crossed the ruined garden and made his way towards the landing. The woman had not heard him, and he was within a few feet of her, when she leaped.

It was all so swiftly done that it took away the breath of his brain. He was a quick-witted man in practical emergencies, more so than men of thought are apt to be, but the adroitness of the woman had countermarched. He felt that he was beaten in his beneficent tactics, and now understood that the ears of the suicide — finer than those of the lovers of life — had betrayed his approach to her. Thinking to save her, he had, in fact, hurried her to her fate.

Before his eyes she leaped and plunged. Her transparent sleeves fell to her shoulders over her bare arms as she flung these above her head. A darkened but a glowing shape, she swept his vision by and sank.

The preacher's half-stunned wits had returned to intelligence within him by this, and he sprang into the boat and got the oars.

The woman had not reappeared. He drove a few iron strokes above the spot where she had sunk. The river had never looked to him so black, it had never run so swiftly, he was sure that it had never been so deep. It occurred to him that she might be holding herself under water deliberately, as some wretched animals have been known to do when weary of life. While he was instinctively peering down into the river, more to keep his own hope afloat than from any real expectation that he could grapple the sinking figure with his eyes, he heard a slight rippling noise some fifty feet away from him down-stream. As he

put about, rowing mightily in the direction of the sound, the simple fact first presented itself to him that the woman had been carried by the current of the mountain stream — for it was strong.

"She must be swirled up," he thought, "whether she wants to or not."

In a moment he had swung the boat down-stream. He had calculated so well that as she rose she struck the planking. His arms shot down as hers came up. He thanked Heaven for every brassy and driver that he had ever held, for every bat and bridle, each rudder and oar. His manly muscle served him, as a man's should, and he gripped the woman — whether she would or no — and lifted her into his boat, with or without her leave, and saved her in her own despite.

She was by now well spent, and nearly if not quite unconscious. His arms clung to her with the fierce instincts of salvation, which are mightier than those of destruction; and did not at once release her when they had laid her on the bottom of the boat at his feet. The man's pulse of him knew that she was a young woman, and formed with a certain sumptuous delicacy. The preacher's conscience of him perceived that she had, to all intents, sinned a great sin, and he wondered how he should deal with her when she should have recovered herself.

She did not immediately do so, although as he put the boat about she gasped and slightly stirred. No

other course occurred to him, and he rowed rapidly back to his own landing. He had recognized her by that time for a member of his own congregation, a "summer lady"; he had seen her sometimes at his church, but it could scarcely be said that he had acquaintance with her. In his efforts to arouse her he called her by name:—

"Mrs. Devon! Mrs. Devon!"

The boat, swinging at its painter, drifted into a whirlpool of moonlight, in whose eddies she showed so white and still that the preacher felt alarmed.

"Mrs. Devon! Aldeth Devon!" he called her, with the tinge of authority natural to his profession. An inarticulate sound replied to him. She struggled a little when he lifted her, and her hands defied him, but he made mockery of their protest, and took her in his arms; these, for a man of his build, were powerful enough, and, half lifting, half dragging her, he got her upon the landing, across the ruined garden, and to his study door. At its threshold he felt her limp body stiffen and rebel, and saw that her half-drowned eyes were wide and reproachful of him.

"There is nothing else to do," he said. "I will call Mrs. Rock."

Without further speech he laid her on his study sofa, and put his hand upon the old-fashioned bell-rope — it was a crocheted bell-rope — which hung by his door.

"She can't hear it," came unexpectedly from the sofa. "She 's too deaf."

"I can go and call her," urged the preacher, stoutly.

"I tell you I won't have her!" cried the woman.

"I tell you you must!" insisted the man.

"Oh, please — oh, *please!*" entreated the voice from the sofa. "She may be deaf, but she is n't dumb. Think of the talk it would make."

If the preacher's lips framed the quick words, "Think of the talk this would make!" they did not form these, but pressed together hard in a chivalrous silence. He stood before the dripping sofa, where the drenched figure of his guest, struggling to her feet, confronted him. He could hear the little sop-sopping of her silk stockings against her soaked slippers as she staggered towards the garden door. Her thin dress, black and clinging, wound about her. Pools of water followed her movements; she stretched her bare arms, groping to the door-jamb; her drenched gauze sleeves were twisted above her elbows.

"I must go right back," she said feebly, "and I must go alone."

"I don't know what kind of man you take me to be!" exploded the minister, "but if you suppose I shall allow anything of the kind — Here. Do as I bid you. Swallow this. We will decide what you shall do afterwards."

She perceived that he was putting brandy to her

lips, and swallowed it obediently; but she did not recede from her position where she stood dizzily swaying on the threshold of his door.

"Now I am *perfectly* able," she pleaded, with a pretty, feminine overemphasis. "And I shall go. I will not have Mrs. Rock called. And I *will* go."

"Where will you go?" demanded Mr. Strong. "Back to the river, for instance?"

"Not to-night. No. I give you my word — no."

"Very well, then," replied the minister, after a moment's hesitation. "You run the risk of pneumonia, of course."

"It is a hot night," urged the shivering woman. "And I am very well — terribly strong. I *can't* die — of anything. That 's certain. What are you doing? Your rain-coat? But it will get so wet! Yes, I know. It would cover me — and nobody at the Crowe's might notice. I — you see. Don't you see?"

"I see that you must be got to your boarding-house without another word," observed the minister, whose quiet peremptoriness now began to have some effect upon her. "Obey me, and I will get you there in the quickest and the least noticeable way I can think of. Trust me — if you can."

"I will try," replied Mrs. Devon, tremulously. He wrapped his long water-proof coat about her soaked dress, and helped her, half leaning, half refusing, across the garden to the landing; thence without a

word into the boat. Still in silence he took the oars and rowed her rapidly down-stream. At the rear of the boarding-house (known to the summer people as Crowe's Nest) he brought the boat up among some muttering flags and laid down his oars.

Then, not till then, he regarded her with a stern solemnity. She had now quite regained herself, and sat erect and strong. The wind had risen, and moonlight shattered by shadows broke and formed upon her. She was yet very pale. But her eyes had a sardonic, half-contemptuous gleam, as if she recognized the full nature of her position, and dared him — perhaps dared the world — to condemn her for it.

"She is perfectly sane," he thought.

"I suppose I am expected to thank you," she observed, with a biting intonation. She did not underscore her words any more, he noticed.

"But you do not?" he asked, kindly enough.

"No, I do not — no. By this time I should have been —" She glanced at the river.

"Why did you do it?" interrupted the preacher.

"Why does anybody do it? The power to suffer is greater than the power to endure. You ought to know that. Perhaps you don't know it. You were never married, were you?"

"Your husband is dead?" queried Mr. Strong, with a delicate hesitation. He remembered that he had never seen the man in Hillcrest.

"If it were *that!*" exclaimed the wife. She turned without a word of gratitude or courtesy and left him. He watched her swaying up the grass-grown path to the boarding-house. Little as he knew her, he felt that it was like her to choose this plain place. She would abhor the hotel. Midway of the path she paused as if too weak to proceed, and wavered into an old arbor, heavy with half-ripe grapes and shriveling leaves. The garden was deserted, and a tangle of tall shrubbery protected the arbor from the house. The preacher took a few steps and joined her.

"You must allow me," he began. "Whatever the consequences, I shall not leave you — in this way."

"You will leave me in any way that I direct," replied the lady, coldly. She struggled to her feet; he bowed and turned, but retraced a step.

"I must speak with you," he said, with determination. "And I shall make an opportunity of doing so as soon as possible."

Her hands made a forbidding gesture, but her lips said nothing audible. As he walked back to the river he heard the swashing of her wet slippers against her feet. Presently the little sopping sound ceased, and he knew that she had reached the shelter of the house.

Within a few days Herman Strong made as good as his word, and boldly called at the boarding-house and requested Mrs. Devon.

"If you don't mind, sir, maybe you'll look her up?"

said Mrs. Crowe, hazily. "She 's never anywhere in particular. Unless it 's at the river. She 's terrible fond of the river. And there's such a lot of cats and hens — if they *are* my boarders — crochetin' and clackin' on the piazza, sir."

Grateful for this zoölogical hint, the preacher sought the garden, and in the grape arbor he found her sitting idly, with listless hands, with lustreless eyes, out of which even the sense of desolation had ceased to look. Seen in the fire of an August noon, Mrs. Devon looked younger than he had thought her, and more attractive. But the minister did not concern himself with the attractions of women. He disregarded her pathetic charm, pausing only in his own mind to think that she had a subtlety of organization rarely to be found among women of her type, and shot his errand at her like an arrow of the Lord.

"Why," he demanded, "did you try to kill yourself?"

"How," she retorted, "am I to get your rain-coat back to you?"

The preacher set his lips and regarded her without the tolerance of a smile.

"It 's wet yet," complained Mrs. Devon. "I have to dry it an inch at a time, when Mrs. Crowe won't see. The whole State of New Hampshire would be gossiping about it. I have concluded to send it to

town to my tailor's, and express it out to you when I 've got home. Will that do?"

She lifted her defiant smile, but her mouth and chin quivered in spite of herself.

"You are pleased to mock me," said the preacher, gravely. "And yet I came here upon a serious errand. I came to save you — if I could."

"You can't," replied Aldeth Devon, with conviction.

"Perhaps not," he sighed. "But I wanted to try, that 's all."

"You are a good man," she said, with a certain contrition of manner. "I will remember what you said — and what you did."

"I have done no more than any decent man would do; and I have said — so far — nothing at all," he urged eagerly.

"Say it, then," she commanded, half petulantly. "Preach me my personally conducted sermon. I will listen — yes, I will. But I tell you beforehand I think I had the right to do it. My life is my own."

"Your life is your God's," he answered solemnly.

"My — what?" she cried.

"Nothing that you suffer — nothing that you *can* suffer — would justify you in hurling your soul back at your Maker before He calls it," argued the minister, if with some professional commonplace, at least with much personal gentleness.

"What do you know about suffering?" she taunted.

"A little," said Herman Strong. "Not much, perhaps, by your standards. At least," he added manfully, "I know right from wrong. And I know that the deed you did — that you meant to do — why, it is a deadly sin! I was sorry to see you commit it. You seemed to me above that kind of weakness. I thought you were more of a woman."

She set her beautiful teeth. "Have you anything more to say?" came from them in bitten breaths.

He shook his head.

"Except to ask you, if you are ever in such extremity again — (I realize that it must be a very great and cruel one) — will you come to me? Will you let me try to help you, if I can?"

She hesitated with her answer — would she yield? would she rebel? — and before her lips had decided it she felt that he had removed their opportunity. He had lifted his hat gravely, and passed from the arbor where the shriveled leaves and half-ripe fruit hung above the woman. He did not return by way of the too feminine piazzas of the Crowe's Nest, but took the grass path to the river, and waded home laboriously through the reeds.

A smaller incident than this has set the cast of many a history, and it would not be easy to overestimate the effect upon Herman Strong of his brief experience

with the woman whom he had saved. She passed out of his life as quickly and quietly as she had crossed it; and that without a sign to indicate that she was conscious of her tremendous indebtedness to him. If he ever wondered at this, it was with that meagre attention given by an absorbed and overworked man to feminine whims. In fact, the episode in which Mrs. Devon had figured, in itself so intensified his preoccupation with a class of deeds and motives beyond reach of her interest, perhaps even of her respect, that neither his thought nor his feeling had room to speculate upon any vagaries of hers. But their consequences remained within him.

In the course of the following winter her personality was forcibly recalled to his attention by an item in the daily press, setting forth the fact that one Jasper Devon, club-man and sporting-man, had been hurled by his touring-car (it was sixty miles an hour, at midnight, and on a strange road) down a twenty-foot embankment. The car turned turtle, the chauffeur crawled out with a broken leg, but Devon did not crawl out at all. The machine took fire.

It occurred to the minister to write to Mrs. Devon in the face of this dreadful event, but on careful thought he refrained from doing so. What could he say? He perceived that he and she had met for one great moment, like submarine navigators, too deep down the sea of truth to assume an unreal attitude.

He could not play with the foam of things, and insult by conventional condolence the terrible facts — either those known or those unknown to him — of her life. He passed her tragic experience by, as she had passed his rescue of her, in that strong silence which may build or shatter comprehension between two persons whom fate has brought together only to drive apart. To most of us this kind of massive muteness is a wall which the soul never climbs.

But the preacher, whose high nature received more powerful impressions from the contact of spirit with spirit than from the impact of event upon event, took to heart the moral impulse that he had gained (admitting that he had gained it) from Aldeth Devon. He had never before dealt with the suicidal temptation in any of its genuine forms; having scarcely gone beyond the knowledge of that coquetry with death by which the young and the lightly stricken sometimes divert themselves. He now set himself seriously, as a scholar does who selects a new language, to understand this mystery of despair — the deepest, the darkest of them all. Hitherto he had been impatient with it, as we are apt to be with the moral danger most removed from our own temperaments. He was so healthy, so happy, so busy, so dedicated, he was so utterly in earnest at living, that he had found it hard to tolerate the fraudulent emotion which plays with the supreme reality of death.

But she — she had solemnly hurled herself from the air-ship of life into unappeasable space; and he — a dangling rope in the blind abyss — only he had interposed. Now the ether began to seem to him peopled with poor souls that he had never understood how to treat — souls clinging to strands, and swaying above destruction for lack of a human hand — the falling aviators of the moral world. His exquisite sympathy, now fastened upon these, clutched them with a grip of iron and fire. Their weakness and piteousness — everything about them weak but their peril — began to appeal to him more than almost any other kind of helplessness that he had wished to sustain. He thought, in a word, profoundly, at times disproportionately, about the thing. It had changed for him from melodrama to tragedy.

Whether this psychic condition attracted them to himself, or whether such spiritual emergencies had, in fact, multiplied within his reach, it became certain that he had never before met with anything like the number of the life-weary that now craved his stronger and healthier nature. They came to his knowledge from the most unexpected quarters, and flung themselves upon his sensitiveness from the most unsuspected causes. He gathered them all to his heart, the real and the unreal, the grave and the light. He learned when to console the victims of a severe and manifest fate, and how to startle the self-tormented

into shame or noble fear. In his own purpose he antedated by several years the departure of the Salvation Army that deals with those to whom life has become intolerable. More often than one would have believed possible, he was sought by men whom the world had tempted into dishonor that no one knew. Women sobbed their danger into his ears — young, deserted girls, and middle-aged, neglected wives who were ready to drop life down as a weight too cruel to be lifted; the incurable sick, and the tortured for sleep; the overborne of this misery, the under-strong for that; people who had never before let their dark secret escape their lips — these confessed it to him, or he surprised it in them — who could say which? — and he moved before them as Jehovah did before the Israelites in the Bible story — a pillar of fire by night, a pillar of cloud by day: always visible, and always leading. The beautiful name that his people had given him was never so often upon their lips as at this time: "The comforter has gone to her." — "He has asked for the comforter." — "Go tell it to the comforter."

Now the curious thing about this was that the loving title began to disturb the minister a little, as if it had been a small thorn from the rose of his ideal of himself. Was it possible that he had comforted too much? Too easily or too indiscriminately? Had he stimulated his people too little? Had he indulged the sense of sorrow at the expense of the consciousness of

sin? This way of phrasing the idea was a clergyman's way; he did not always escape the terminology of his calling; but in this as in other instances there was something in the phrase broader and more human than pulpit or parish understands.

It occurred to him that he might have chanced upon a matter of some vitality to a spiritual teacher, and he put it aside — for he was too busy a man to answer his own questions as he went along — until he should find leisure to think of it further. Meanwhile he had his people; and they, thanking God, had him. They found no adequate expression of the feeling that he aroused in them at this time, and used to sit before him in a kind of dumb adoration more flattering than speech or language.

But Herman Strong could not be flattered. This was perhaps his greatest peculiarity. He went about his Master's business too eagerly for personal vanity. He preached, he prayed, he loved, he lifted, like a man whose time was too short to lose a chance at a human soul. His church was thronged to the vestibules. Young men crowded the aisles and defied the fire laws. He had never preached in his life as he did then. This he did extemporaneously, and most of his remarkable pulpit work is lost to the treasury of the church. Certain of his people cherished fragments of it in notebooks, and from glimpses of these one may know how extraordinary he was. The whole hill country hon-

ored the man. He moved before them with a spiritual splendor which they had never seen. They had read now and then of such a preacher; but outside the biographies, who looks to find a soul so choice?

He who was the object of this parish worship waved it aside indifferently, and rose into the ether of his own consecration, as the consecrated do — himself the last to be concerned about himself. His passion for the salvation or the consolation of other souls had well-nigh made him forget that he had one of his own. An aged man of the people, who had outlived many Hill-crest pastorates, said to his wife: —

"Parson 's a balloon on fire. He 's got to come down or blaze to cinders."

"Soda biscuit," said the elderly wife. "And canned soup. That 's the matter of parson. He 's put up at Mis' Rock's too continual. Her cookin 's chicken-feed. I used to send him jells and meat pies. But he said it hurt her feelin's."

Who shall say how it was, or why, or when, that the subtle change, imperceptible to any but himself, over-took the preacher? At first he thought it was wholly a physical one: he perceived that he was tired; that he needed rest; that it was distasteful to him to seek it and impossible to obtain it. It occurred to him that his boarding-house was dismal; that his landlady was deaf and deafer; that the table was poor and poorer.

"Mrs. Rock," he said one day, with the pathetic patience of an ill-nourished but considerate man, "is n't there *any* other way of cooking potatoes but to *boil* them?"

He began to push away his canned soups and ignore his soda biscuits. He took a book to the dining-room, and another to bed. He read much and feverishly — often half the night, for he found that he did not sleep as he used to do — but he forgot what he had read and sat musing. He brooded a good deal over his parishioners — their sorrows and their errors, their failure to do or to be the thing that he had hoped they would. Drinking boys who had broken their pledges; giddy girls who had drifted back to the city; surly men who, after forced attacks of good nature, had relapsed into household tyrants — these moral cripples fell before him like his own shadow when he walked away from the sun: he could not escape the presence of them.

It began, indeed, to seem to him that he himself was the cripple, that the faults of his people must be his own. He began for the first time for many busy, happy years to think of himself. That he thought of himself to reproach himself did not help the matter very much. His joyous nature had declined into a certain sadness so foreign to him that he hardly knew it to be sadness, and called it by other names — dyspepsia, nervousness, brain-fag, or what not. He drove

himself mightily, as sacrificial souls do, flogging his spirits and taking the bit of energy between his teeth, plunging into every generous deed that he could think of, doing the hardest things that he could find to do. He was startled to find that no invention of the conscience helped him any.

He had reached, but he did not know that he had reached, the subtlest peril that can beset the dedicated — the impulse to doubt the value of their own or indeed of any consecration. The great reaction of spiritual overstrain had come upon the man — the finest, one might say the shrewdest, of moral emergencies. He began to consider the ingratitude, the unworthiness, of many persons for whom he had lighted the altar of his life. He began to ask the most dangerous question that any religious teacher can ask himself — "Is it all worth while?" He felt himself bowed beneath the ache and the evil of the souls that he had lifted. He waded like Christophorus into the river of confusion, carrying the sins and sorrows of the earth — bent under the load that belongs only to the Saviour of the world.

Now that which disturbed him most was that which he had borne most tenderly and frequently — the dead weight of those who were weary of life. These tragic histories haunted his heart and taunted his imagination. He wished he had known less about them. He wished he did not understand their plight

so well. He began to dread his simple and holy memories. He had in his library a French book called *La Contagion sacrée.* The phrase recurred to him with a sinister change in the adjective. Was the *contagion damnée* upon him? Had he been infected by the souls that he had saved? As a physician may be by the taint of a patient? As an alienist sometimes is by the mental atmosphere of an asylum?

That summer was a hot and hard one, and he worked through it without respite — fiercely, one might have said; as if he dared not fall below the highest flights of self-obliteration. His church brimmed over. The summer people and the winter people united in their tender idealization of the man. He walked in a mist of love and loyalty.

One Sunday he preached a sermon which is well remembered in Hillcrest to this day. He chose a simple enough topic, one that any of a hundred ministers might have selected at that very hour — the beauty and glory of life. These optimistic subjects are common in our pulpits; but, while Herman Strong spoke, it seemed to his audience that he spoke in unknown tongues, which suddenly as they listened became translated for them, but only in part; as if the preacher used spiritual idioms that they had never learned. He knew quite well that he should not be altogether understood, only affectionately followed; so he felt safe, and rashly poured out his soul before his people. As

it has been said that a poet sometimes reveals in a lyric to the whole world the secret of his heart which he would refuse to his dearest friend, so the preacher, overworn with that solitude of the strong which the weak cannot companion, flung from his pulpit the secret of his innermost, his deadliest temptation.

Out of his entire audience only one person interpreted him. He perceived in due time that one did. She was a stranger, a lady, darkly dressed, and veiled. At first she had reminded him indefinitely of the woman whom he saved from the river. But Mrs. Devon had never returned to Hillcrest since the violent death of her husband, two years before. He had been told that she was abroad — in Venice, Florence, Paris, or wherever — and likely to remain there, and, in fact, he found difficulty in believing that it was she who sat before him, "stone-silent and stone-still." But when at last she raised the strip of black chiffon which concealed her face, he felt that he was detected by her eyes. These had a solemn energy — half compassion, half rebuke — which seemed to grasp him. He returned her look sturdily. But he knew that his secret was his own no longer.

He spoke on, quietly enough: —

"Most of us have found it possible in sleep to redream favorite dreams from which we had awakened. Are you disillusioned of life? Regain the dream! — All of us know how often a man's existence

depends upon his power to grip a chance at the moment when it is thrown to him. Is the rope of courage sliding between your trembling fingers? Hold to it! Do not look down; that will bring a mortal giddiness. Look up, and hold! There is no moral peril too acute, there is none too imminent to be escaped. — You know how it is when we have a great love and lose it; we begin to understand what it was worth to us — we never did before. So it is with the splendid treasure which we call life — hard, familiar, common life. If a man in a moment of distaste and weariness should hurl it away — what would he offer, what would he endure, to recall the scorned and precious thing?"

The preacher's voice sank suddenly into low, impassioned prayer.

"Lord," he said, "teach us how great life is; how dear it ought to be. Hold us — we are not always strong. Comfort us — we sometimes sorely need it."

His faltering accents fell. He heard the sobbing of some women in the church, and saw the faces of men, confused and dull, staring at him. He finished the service with composure and left the pulpit. He felt the gaze of Mrs. Devon upon him, trembling but determined, like the movements of search-light upon water. But he did not look at her, and disappeared within the pastor's room.

The people watched him stupidly. Something in

his appearance perplexed them; as a canto of Dante's would, or a stanza from Omar Khayyám.

"Pastor 's off his feed," said the old wife who sent him "jells" and meat pies. But the aged parishioner, her husband, shook his head.

"'T ain't alwers what a man 's *et*," he answered slowly. "Pastor he ain't *happy* — see?"

It was an August night, and sultry as a dying world. Forest fires in the hills had choked the lungs of the air to paralysis. There was no moon, and the river ran like one of those pit-black streams on whose banks we struggle in our troubled sleep. The scanty flowers in the old garden were brown with drought. The boat at the landing lapped the water so lightly that one could scarcely hear it by listening. Mrs. Rock had cleared away her Sunday supper (always the worst of the week), and gone long since to bed. The minister's study was as still as the tropics before a hurricane. Herman Strong sat before his desk with his eyes fixed straight before him. These, for want of anything more inspiring to look at, were fastened upon the old crocheted bell-rope. The bell-rope was worked in wheels of red and blue; he followed the pattern idly — from blue to red, from red to blue.

He felt it to be important that he should fix his attention on something definite. When he had observed the bell-rope as long as he could, he got up with a quick, determined motion and went out.

When he had crossed the garden he returned and took a small Testament from his desk, and put it in his vest pocket over his heart. As he did this he stroked the Testament caressingly. But he went immediately back again across the garden and down to the landing. The smoke from the forests stifled him. High on the hills he could see a sword of flame.

On the brink of the water he paused, and stood for some time. The clock of his church struck, and he counted the call of midnight. He fixed his mind upon the voice of his clock as he had done upon the crocheted pattern of the bell-rope. When the last stroke ceased he felt unprotected. His fingers wandered to the Testament above his heart, but slid away from it. He pulled upon the painter, and the boat leaped towards him; half-way it stuck, for some reason, and refused. He persisted, and the boat — regretfully, it seemed — obeyed. He stooped and urged the rope.

Did it rebel or yield? Did he slip or not? Was it merciful accident or piteous intent? No one knows, or will know, and the only person who might have asked has scorned to do so. As he tottered, he felt himself grasped. Two arms clasped him, and with a strength which seemed to him more than man's — as assuredly it was more than woman's — sustained him. Soft lips sought his ear, and a low cry thrilled his being: —

"You shall live! I say, you shall *live!*"

Upon the landing, yielding, confused, he found himself staggering. The woman's arms did not release him. It seemed to him as if the essence of human need and succor were in her clasp. It was as if all weakness that he had ever lifted, all misery that he had consoled, all error that he had prevented in his whole patient, compassionate life, had returned to him and clung to him to clutch him from despair. Aldeth Devon's arms were the arms of the suffering, erring world which had always been the nobler for his being in it — until now. Ah, God, until now!

His head dropped upon his breast. His wet hand, shaking, sought his little Testament, and reverently put it to his lips. By this he had sunk to his knees upon the landing, but the woman had not let him go. As he knelt, she knelt. Then he perceived that she was sobbing on his heart.

A moment gone, and she was impersonal, salvatory, influence or angel — something half celestial. Now— what was she now? All woman and all love.

The delicacy of her beautiful body, impassioned as no ruder organization could be, shrank from the revelation which her natural and noble impulse had opened, like the windows of heaven, before the devotee. In the darkness the crimson drove across her averted face, and she made as if she would have freed herself from the crisis which she had brought upon them both.

But now his were the arms to clasp, and his the voice to cry with the astonishment of ecstasy: —

"Why, I love you! I love you! — I believe I always have."

They had risen to their feet and stood solemnly enclasped, heart to heart, breath to breath. But, with the simplicity of a devout boy, the lover said, —

"Before I kiss you — let me pray." She heard him whisper, "God forgive me! God forgive me!" twice. Then she lifted her lips.

Thus he loved, and hence he lived. No lesser man can know how it fares with one of the sons of God when he enters the kingdom of human joy. For that is larger than the province of pain. But the citizens thereof are of another race, and their spiritual teachers wear the order of a differing mystery. The preacher looked far down the vistas of a blinding happiness, and said to his forecasting soul: —

"Will they lose their comforter?"

It is in the nature of fire to consume that on which it feeds, and it is the essence of ignorance that we do not know when we are ignorant. To this day the Hillcrest people wonder why the minister left them, or how they ever could have let him go. The old parishioner with the wife who made "jells" said: —

"Pastor 's *too* happy — see?"

Joy, like death, is a river wide and deep, and can

sunder hearts as truly as that other. From whatever cause, this, at least, occurred: The man came to feel that his own received him not, or that he could not claim them as he used to do; as if he had grown dull in the beautiful art of soul attraction; and with characteristic humility he believed that he had deserved this consequence — God and the river and one woman knowing why; that he was not worthy to be understood by those on whom he had lavished the young, the sensitive years of his life. Half in repentance, half in resolve, he sought the hardest post that he could fill among the outcasts of a great town, and Aldeth his wife followed him, wondering a little in her turn, but content not to understand so long as she may love him. For she has learned already that he who has consoled so many comfortless, himself needs cherishing more than other men.

THE CHIEF OPERATOR

EXCEPT for the noise of the storm the exchange was noticeably quiet. For an hour calls had been few; when they came they tangled and overlapped as if from some general cause affecting particular cases. Men were occupied with facing the weather, or hurrying home from it. Many mothers had gone out with umbrellas and little coats to bring children back from school. There was a lull in the demands upon the wire, which for a small country exchange was rather a busy one. Now and then a drop fell, or a young voice called, "Number?" and between whiles the girls chattered disjointedly as girls do when they have half a chance; or looked dismally out upon the rain from the drowning windows. There were two girls, known as Molly and Mary, and the chief operator, held in respect by them not only for a certain power to enforce official authority, but because she was a married woman; and Molly and Mary were at the age when this circumstance appeared of more importance than it ever does before or after. The effect was depleted a little by the fact that Mrs. Raven was a widow; but she was quite a young widow, and still attractive — who could have said why? Of beauty she had little or

none; but the eye remained upon and returned to her. The girls thought it was an "air" she had, the fit of a shirt-waist, the hang of a skirt, the way of braiding her bright hair below the head-receiver. An older or finer observer would have said, "It is her expression."

This was self-possessed, but gentle; the old-fashioned word modest might have said it better than any of the newer feminine adjectives. There was a firm curve to her full, irregular lip which every operator knew and regarded, but her clear eyes, wide and warm, found it more natural to plead than to command. Her features, her gestures, her voice, appealed. She was without self-assertion. This, one would soon have determined, was not from deficiency in force, but from the acquisition of a quality which is the essence of force, although it may seem at first to be antagonistic to it. In some way, in some form, life had taught her to disregard herself. Even the girls perceived that their young chief was not uppermost in her own thoughts. They supposed it was because she was a widow.

It had rained continuously for three days and nights, and the river was swollen and perturbed. It was not a very broad river in its normal condition, but a deep one, and swung upon a powerful current. Now it had risen, and looked unnaturally large; the banks, at that point, were low, and the exchange stood within

a hundred feet of the water. This gave a cool, agreeable outlook, which the chief operator liked in summer, and at which she glanced gratefully whenever she could. It was August — the scorching August of 1908. She sat at her desk apart from her staff of two, beside the large, low window. The exchange stood by itself — a wooden building well put together; there was a small grocery-store upon the first floor; the telephone occupied the second story; the grocer was an old man, and sometimes walked a part of the way to protect Mrs. Raven when she went home to her stepmother's house, two miles down the desolate riverside, at half-past nine at night; after that no woman remained in the exchange, and the night operator came on duty.

The town had the wide spaces and uncertain comforts of the territory. The telephone was cherished accordingly. It was still treated like a miracle.

Sarah Raven sat at her desk and looked thoughtfully into the storm. It was towards the end of the month, and the great drought had broken, only to be renewed in a fiercer form after passing relief. Meanwhile the dark weather had something of the effect which the interruption of drought always has; finding one less grateful than one should be because one has become so accustomed to sunshine that its absence influences the spirits to the defiance of the season. Mrs. Raven was tired with the season's work, and

somewhat pale. She was a compact little figure of a woman; her black skirt and white waist with the black tie at her throat looked like a uniform or a habit upon her. She sat a trifle averted from the girls, the profile of her face and delicate bust against the long window set in a mist of rain and river. The head-receiver gave a Greek look to the American working-woman.

More than the sadness of storm was on her that afternoon, and as the day declined this increased. She attended listlessly to her duties when the girls called: "Number? What number?" and her eyes returned to the bloated river. What mattered a creeping tear if the river alone could see? This was August the 28th. To-morrow would be one of the anniversaries of which people who know life say that they are "days to be got over." To-morrow would be — From the pang of it she tried to forget, and then for the love of it she determined to remember, and then she dashed forgetting and remembering from her, and whirled upon her revolving-chair.

There was a sudden acceleration of demands upon the exchange. Calls came in from everywhere—most of them were impatient, and many irritable. Wives were summoning husbands, and husbands reassuring wives. "The storm is so bad — do get home! The house shakes, and the river frightens me. Hurry home, Harry; do!" — "Don't be anxious, Sue, if I am

late to-night. It's pretty bad, and hard going. I'll get there some time." Messages rained as hard as the storm. The drops upon the switchboard clattered fast.

"What number?" asked Molly.

"Chief operator?" called Mary.

"Chief operator," said Mrs. Raven, instantly.

The wind had mounted in the last half-hour and buffeted the exchange, which shook in the grip of it. The river ran angrily, and took on a frown as the early twilight of the storm descended. Between the three sounds — the threat of the water, the onset of the wind, and the complaining of the rain — it was hard to hear the slender cry of the wire. The girls had ceased to chatter, and listened sedulously.

The electric bulbs, staring with their indifferent eyes behind their softening shades, brightened as the room darkened; for an unnatural dusk had set in upon the place. The switchboard itself wore a curious look, almost an expression, like that of a face — a consciousness; it had the air of power before which the girlish figures playing upon it were trivial and inefficient — the puppets of a mystery which might turn master when it appeared to be most slave. Somehow the rage of the river and the storm added to this impression; as if the elemental forces — water, wind and electricity — had combined into insurrection against human control.

If Mrs. Raven felt this, she had not time to think it;

she had no time to think at all before there came quivering down the wire from her chief at headquarters, some fifteen miles up-stream, an order before which she stiffened into military attention. Now her voice rose like a thing that was trying to fly, and grew a trifle shrill; then it fell into the low, sustained telephone tones.

"What did you say? Please repeat. It is very noisy here. The storm — Please repeat, I say — More distinctly —

" — *What?* I don't get it all. Something ails your transmitter. — I can't make it all out — only a few words. — *What?*"

She had begun to tremble now; her bright head, with its Greek headpiece like a fillet, shook, and her hands. The operators at the switchboard had snatched at the sense of the message, and she could hear them crying out between disjointed fragments. Now the disability in the current — or perhaps it was the interference of the storm — had for the moment succumbed, and the call from headquarters, peremptory and clear as cut glass, came to her ears with the insistence of irrevocable catastrophe.

"The dam is going down. The river is breaking loose. Run for your lives! You have no time to spare. Notify anybody you can, but fly for your life! Do you hear me? Good-by."

"I hear you perfectly," said Sarah Raven. "I thank you for notifying me. Good-by."

Her chair whirled, but she did not leave it.

"Girls — " she began. But the girls had already plucked the danger from the wire and had melted from the switchboard madly; they were flitting and screaming like the flock of birds swaying outside the window — little beings seeking shelter from fate, and fussily complaining of it.

"You can go, Molly and Mary," said the chief operator, quietly. She put out her hand for her official directory.

"Mrs. Raven! Mrs. Raven!" cried Molly. "Why don't you come, too?"

"Mrs. Raven!" called Mary. "*Dear* Mrs. Raven! Hurry! — Mrs. Raven, ain't you coming with us?"

"No, I am not coming — not yet. Don't talk to me, girls. I have my subscribers to think of first. Good-by, girls."

The girls dashed at her and kissed her and pleaded with her; but she repeated obstinately, "Good-by, girls," and so they turned, sobbing childishly, thinking of themselves, as girls do, and started for the stairs. At the top of the long flight Mary looked back and cried out once more: —

"*Dear* Mrs. Raven! — Don't you want me to stay, too?" But Sarah Raven did not answer. It was doubtful if she heard. Her record of listed subscribers

wavered in her hand, but her voice did not shake at all. As Mary went down the stairs she heard it echoing through the empty exchange.

"Is this 122 — ring 2?"

The young chief was calling her subscribers. She was about to warn them. Mary knew that Mrs. Raven meant to warn them all — all who were in danger and had not been notified. There were forty of them in the lower valley. At the foot of the stairs, tumbling out pellmell, the girls heard one authoritative order — their last — from the exchange above: —

"Tell the grocer. Tell Mr. Rice. He's old. He needs plenty of time."

Sarah Raven left her desk and went to the deserted switchboard. She had removed her head-receiver to do so, and put on one belonging to the girls. She sat at her post with a composure which affected every muscle; if it did not reach the nerve, one watching her would not have known it. But there was no one to watch. She heard the hysterical flurry of the girls cease upon the stairs, but scarcely with attention to the circumstance. She was too much alone to think about it. She was not thinking of herself at all — not yet. She felt in some subterranean corridor of her being that the moment would come when she should; but dismissed the idea as an interruption to her duty. To this she set herself with a passion that obliterated

everything else gloriously; as passion does when it is high enough.

If anything that she did in that whirlwind of mind and heart could be called deliberate, she had deliberately chosen to call 122, ring 2, the first of all. It seemed to her that she had the right to so much — and the house was very near the water.

"For Father's sake," she thought. "She was Father's wife. And she's been a good stepmother to me."

Flashing, and fading as soon as they had flashed, she saw the comfortable commonplace things that signified home to her — an orderly sitting-room with a hot Rochester burner on the centre-table; a red silk shade; a light-wood blaze sparkling on the hearth for her when she should drag herself in, drenched and tired; the table set for supper with willow ware in the dining-room beyond; a portly, kindly figure trundling in a blue cotton dress and white apron across the room to say: — "Land! You must be frazzled out." As the door swung back she could see her husband's crayon portrait above the mantelpiece.

Her voice pierced the turmoil of water and wind with an astonishing self-possession: —

"Mother! Run for your life! The dam is broken. Don't wait for anything — run! — No, I can't come yet — No, it does n't matter about me — not till I've warned my subscribers — Oh, I *must* take time to say

— you 've been a good mother to me — No, no, no, I *can't do it.* Good-by."

She was surprised to find, when she had rung off her stepmother's agitated cries and entreaties, that she did not know for a wild moment what to do next; which of all the human homes dependent upon her to warn first. She perceived that they depended no more upon her heroism than upon her good sense, and yet that seemed to be the very quality which was deserting her. She sat drenched in the cold sweat of indecision, and for a few minutes she rang up her subscribers mechanically, by order of their number: 123 — 123, ring 1 — 124 — 125.

But she quickly collected herself and began to select from the unconscious families upon which the doom of the river was bearing down. With the swiftness of a sympathetic operator in a country exchange where she knew everybody and everybody knew her, she recalled the circumstances of her subscribers — who was sick, who was incompetent, who was hysterical, who had no man in the house.

She had rung up the daughter of a bed-ridden mother; they two lived alone at the bend of the stream where the flood must double upon itself and leave but half a chance, if any, even now; she was calling: —

"128? Fanny! The river is rising. Run for the neighbors to lift her. You have n't a minute. Run!"

She was still crying: — "Fanny! Get the neighbors

to lift her!" when the old grocer stumbled up the stairs and stood wheezing behind her. He had grasped her by the arm and shoulder.

"You get out o' here!" he screamed.

She shook her head without a glance.

"I won't have it. I tell you I won't stand by and see it!" shouted the grocer. "You come along o' me. There 's time ef you 're spry. Lord! Feel this damn building rock! You drop them there wires and get out o' here, I say! — *Won't*, hey? Well, Sarah Raven, I 'll jest set here till you will."

The grocer sat down and looked at her obstinately; he was shriveled with terror. The flood had yet a considerable distance to come; the dam was six or seven miles above the telephone headquarters in the country town; but the writhing valley helped the advance of the torrent, and it was impossible either then or after to time that terrible race.

The old grocer stamped up and down the room; he had begun to gibber.

"Mr. Rice," said the operator, "this room is the property of the Southwestern Telephone Company, and I am their officer. I order you to leave the place. Oh, go!" she broke into a womanish cry, "there may be somebody — something — "

At this he went, as she had thought he would; she did not turn her head to see; she felt that she was alone with her duty. She glanced out of the long window.

She saw foam and heard thunder. The stream, frenzied by rain, had already acquired a terrible breadth. It was not yet quite dark.

"It looks like the River of Death," she thought. She did not look at it again. Her eyes, burned dry, smarted as if they had been fastened to her task with hot wax. The electric jets beneath their green shades winked and dimmed about her. The building quivered through every oaken sinew. A man might have been pardoned had he shaken with sheer physical terror. A soldier might have fled and been forgiven. The young woman sat at her post like a figure carved from the switchboard, a creature born of the thrill and power of modern life, whose opportunities replace the old brutal heroisms by as much as its ingenuities are finer. She rang to her task as truly as the call-bells, and clung to it as simply as the plugs and levers. She could easily have escaped from the building; there was still plenty of time; but it did not occur to her to do so.

Her mind worked swiftly now, and very clearly. Yet down the list of her subscribers her feeling ran ahead of her thought. Her instinct to save was quicker than electricity. It leaped before the current could, and melted with pity into forty homes. She set her white teeth and glanced over her shoulder at the advancing terror.

"You — *you!*" she defied it. "I'll warn them all in spite of you."

Then she grew abject, and humbly entreated the river: —

"Just give me time, won't you? I need more time."

There was a little boy down with scarlet fever at 116, ring 3. The house stood too near the banks. Oh, they all did, for that matter. It would be hard to get the little fellow out — and in the storm! There seemed to be as much water falling from above as there was rising from below. Her name? What *was* her name? Was the operator's reason going with all the rest?

. . . "Mrs. Penney! Run for your life — and Johnny's! The dam is broken. Wrap Johnny up in something — your water-proof. Leave everything else — only Johnny. Somebody will take him in. Oh, I am sure they will. You have n't a minute. Good-by."

. . . "Miss Gregory? Is that Maria Gregory? There 's a flood coming. Keep your head, Maria — you 're the only person in the house that has one — and get your mother and sister out. Good-by."

. . . "Mr. Cole? That you, Mr. Cole? The dam is broken. Run for your lives! The nurse will help lift her — and the new baby — You have time if you 're quick. Good-by."

. . . "Mrs. Bassett? There 's a flood coming down the valley. Count your children and run for their

lives — Don't stop to ask a question. Do as I tell you. Run! Good-by."

. . . "Mary Brown! Mary Brown! The river is rising. Don't stop for anything. Get out of the house with your father. Is he sober to-night? Can he walk? —Then *roll* him out. You 'll drown if you don't. — Good-by."

. . . "Mr. Henshaw? Mr. Henshaw, that you? There 's a flood coming. Run and intercept Jenny on her way from the office. Don't go back home. Run!"

. . . "Helen Patterson? Helen Patterson! Is n't this 126, ring 3? Mrs. Patterson? — 126 — ring 3? Helen Patterson?"

The call-bell at 126, ring 3, remained unanswered. The operator's fingers flew along her plugs: 126, ring 4? But 126, ring 4, was silent, too.

"112? Is this 112? Are n't you there, 112? Why don't you answer me? I am Mrs. Raven. The dam is broken. Can't you speak? 112? Can't you *hear?*"

She rebuffed the truth from her as long as she could. She played upon the board bravely. She piled number upon number, selecting here and there, testing every wire on her map. She kept her head and her courage till this was done. Then for a moment her hands fell upon her lap, and her chin upon her breast.

But she collected herself quickly, and recalled with a dash of shame at her passing confusion that the up-stream wires still hung between herself and her

headquarters. She rang up her manager, nervously now, without waiting for him to answer.

"I have to report that my lower wires are down. They are *all* down. I can't notify my subscribers — any more. — I have done the best I could, sir. — I can't do anything — more."

She thought he tried to say — "Escape!" But if he replied at all, and she was not sure that he did, the word was cut off as if it had been slashed with a knife. At the same instant, suddenly and utterly the lights went out.

The operator's voice trailed away into beaten silence, and she stared about her into the oscillating darkness. The wires to headquarters were disabled, too. Nothing would be done about it; nothing could be; the trouble men could not work in the flood; probably the poles were going or gone. The last strand that connected her with the living world had snapped. The electric fire, so long her servant, had betrayed her. Up to now she had comforted herself by the sense of contact with humankind, with the living voices in the human homes for the sake of which she had ceased to think of herself or her young life. So profound and so absorbing was her sense of solitude that at first it half displaced from her consciousness what it signified to her. The ruin of the wires gave her the right to think of herself — to save herself, after all.

She sprang, but the head-receiver — the signal of

her official duty — held her. She removed it and went to the window. The floor, as she crossed it, swayed like a reeling bridge. She glanced at the river. It was an ocean of blackness, flogged by foam. She ran to the head of the stairs, but stopped to look out of the front window. She could swim — all the river girls could — and it suggested itself to her that, if the water were only quiet enough, she might yet make her way to land.

One look sufficed her. There was no longer any river; it had become a raving sea. The exchange stood, an island in a whirlpool. Perhaps it would continue to stand — it was a sturdy building. That was a reasonable chance, she thought, and she clung to it sensibly.

She felt her way to her seat at her switchboard, and from long habit, perhaps, put on her head-receiver, or it might have been that she still cherished a hope that the trouble men would be able to do something and repair the trunk wire. It was impossible for her to judge of this, and at all events she chose to keep to her post.

In the dark she began to grope for her plugs and drops, feeling for the numbers that she knew almost as well by sense of touch as by sense of sight. There might still be a chance to warn some helpless family— some foolish, incompetent woman, or disabled person. She reviewed her list of subscribers, name by name,

asking whom she had omitted. It comforted her to believe that all the sick people had been told in time. She sat before her switchboard and thought of this. She had not found time yet to think of herself.

Every one who has listened much to electric systems knows how impressive is their capacity for rhythmical sound. Wild weather strikes strange concords or discords from the local labyrinth. He could not have known the burden of his words who told us of "the music of the spheres" centuries before electricity was named or tamed.

The operator with her metal fillet on her head hears nothing of this inchoate harmony; only the obedient hum or the rebellious roar of her working-line. But as she walks home on bitter nights beneath the frosted wires, or lies hearing their thrilling cry upon the roof above her tired head, she listens with the acute sentience of her calling. She cannot deafen to the overmastering voices as another might. Her auditory nerves are never at rest. Sleep scarcely assuages them. She longs for silence which she may not find. If she be at all a sensitive woman, or especially if she be a music-loving one, she fancies curious harmonies or dissonances even in the monotonous and maddening buzz of the wire whose bond-slave she is. The world to her is never still; it is an autocracy of electric sound.

Sarah Raven had been, in a simple, country fashion,

a musical girl, and she had been used to imagine sometimes that the current and the weather, united or apart, played accompaniments or struck melodies to the hymns and sacred songs by which the musical education of the village was chiefly bounded: little tinkling things that she had heard in churches and at weekly meetings — *Shall we gather at the river?* was one of them. There was another that she used to like:

> "Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood,
> Stand dressed in living green."

Now the wires were rent and snarled and flung — dashed and drowned in air and water. Yet — how was this? — the great choral seemed to her to sweep along outside the rocking building, as sounds that have actually ceased continue to repeat themselves to overstrained ears. As she sat at her post awaiting her fate — this was now a matter of moments, but her thoughts and sensations seemed to cover a long time — as she sat there, patient and grand, she remembered that she had meant to pray for herself as she had been taught in her religiously trained childhood. There had not been any time to think of that. Who, with forty human homes to warn, could stop for such a thing?

Plainly, it had been impossible. She wondered if God would blame her because she had forgotten her own soul.

Now, stealing upon the brutal uproar in whose

central cell she was imprisoned, there came to her consciousness the strains of one of the great hymns by the power of which men have lived and died for more than a hundred and fifty years of human struggle.

Upon the wings of many waters she could hear this borne past the tottering building. It seemed to her as if it had stopped to take her up and sweep her on with it; as a phalanx of soldiers with their bugles and drums might gather up some defenseless creature in a riot, and so protect him.

"Jesus, Lover of my soul! . . .

. . . . . .

"While the billows near me roll,
While the tempest still is high. . . .

. . . . . .

"Jesus, Lover of my soul! . . .
Let me to Thy bosom fly."

. . . . . .

The morning wore a wicked glitter. It showed a blazing, almost a blasting, sun, and there was no wind. But for the river it would have been a very quiet, cheerful day; one of the mornings when people hurry out-of-doors, laughing, and make up little picnics, and play with children, and smile at neighbors passing, and wish them good-day with cheery hearts.

But no one smiled that day throughout the valley. Tragic searching-parties followed the river's new and fatal banks. Boats went down as soon as the torrent

would hold them, and, swirling on snapping oars, hunted for signs of death or life. All the stalwart citizens offered themselves, and every man who could row or swim volunteered to leave no snag untouched, no eddy unexamined. A few persons floating on trees or roofs had been saved at dawn. More whom it was too late to save had been silently lifted and covered from sight. The old grocer ran to and fro calling shrilly.

"Where is Sarah Raven? Can't *any*body find Mrs. Raven? Mebbe she 's a livin' woman somewheres yet."

"He tried to put out in a boat for her last night," a compassionate neighbor said, "but he was oversot, and it 's kinder crazed him."

Mary and Molly had followed the grocer, and stood childishly wringing their hands. For once in their little lives they did not talk. They felt ashamed to.

Midway of the morning there appeared a few men on horseback from the county town. These were the officials of the Southwestern Telephone Company — the manager, the superintendent of construction, and one or two subordinates. Their rigid faces wore the look of overwrought and sleepless men who are divided between grief and action. They were silent as men are in such a case, but they worked with the more formidable determination for that.

Six miles — eight miles — ten miles down the stream, ahorse and afoot, and by spinning boats, the

search went past the people. But the river vindictively refused to them their heroine.

It was hot, still noon when a man, wading waist-deep beneath a flooded orchard, called loudly for help, and twenty ran and dashed into the water at his side.

Twelve miles below her own exchange the young operator lay among the trees; so quietly, one might have said, from the smile of her so happily, that it seemed half a pity to intrude upon her dream. Whatever it was, it had the sense of security that our dreams never know; and it would have been difficult to suppose, as one regarded her mercifully unmarred face, that she had ever suffered.

A mud-bespattered wagon with a limping horse that had followed the search since daylight stopped opposite the mute, bareheaded group. A large woman climbed down — a woman in a drabbled blue cotton dress with a soaked white apron; she plodded laboriously through the mud at the orchard's edge; she was sobbing without restraint.

"Gentlemen," she said, "bein' men-folks, I don't know 's you 'll feel to care so much to know it, but if she 'd been my own — I never knew she warn't — and, gentlemen, it is the 29th of August —and that 's her wedding-day."

The manager of the Telephone Company, her chief from the upper town, rode splashing through the water and stood uncovered before Sarah Raven.

"She saved a good many," he said, speaking with difficulty. "She 's got that comfort. It 's more than most of us will ever get in this world. As nearly as we can tell there are fifty persons alive to-day that — if it had n't been for *her* — "

He could not finish what he was saying, but the old grocer, half crazed, fell upon his knees in the water.

"Lord," he cried, "forgive us our trespasses! Question is whether we 're *wuth* it, Lord!"

Now it was seen that the manager had asked leave to help carry her through the flooded trees. He looked down upon her proudly as he waded at her side.

"For the honor of the company," he thought.

But her stepmother babbled as she sobbed: —

"She 'd oughter been buried in her wedding-dress. But it 's gone—with everything else. She ain't even a home to her dear body to be laid out in."

"Every home left standing is hers to-day, madam," the chief answered, with emotion. "But that is the company's privilege. She is not yours any longer, madam; she is ours. No, she is not ours — she is the world's."

He stooped and touched her with a solemn reverence. The head-receiver, with its Greek look, was still fastened upon her bright hair. When some one would have removed it, the chief refused.

"We will not disturb that crown," he said.

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